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ESTHER



ED. ROUTLEDGE & SONS, THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.

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A STORY OF THE OREGON TRAIL.



LONDON :
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A

STORY OF THE OREGON TRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

WESTWARD.

OUR every footstep treads upon a grave! The keel of the snowy-pinioned vessel but turns a fleecy furrow while plowing its way over the abodes of death. Earth is but one vast tomb, where sleep, side by side, commingling their dust, the king and peasant, the master and slave, the beautiful and the repulsive. Beneath the iron-clad feet of our swift steeds—beneath the thunder-rush and lightning speed of engines—beneath the quick, firm tread of business men, and beneath the gentle pressure of the daintily-slipped feet of lovely women, lie the mouldering form—the dust of stalwart men and the more delicate clay that was fashioned by the Master hand into childhood, girlhood, womanhood—beauty. We turn from scenes of busy life, and enter the deep forest, unthinking and careless that beneath our footsteps lie the mouldering bones of the war-painted warrior, beside his broken spear and stringless bow; and, in another place, the dusky forest-maiden, who once wreathed amid the dull blackness of her hair the gorgeously-tinted buds and blossoms of the God-cultured prairie. But so it is. The star that leads civilization westward shines sadly upon the graves of a people almost extinct—a people that have been hunted ruthlessly from their greenwood haunts till every year has seen their graves multiplying thicker and thicker in the wilderness. Then the Anglo-Saxon comes to plow it up and plant corn above the dead warriors, stooping now and then to pick up a stone arrow-head from his furrow, and examine it curiously, as if he did not know what soil his sacrilegious plow was upturning.

The Indian sees his council-fires flicker out one by one, scarcely rising skyward long enough to gild the ruins of his bark and skin-covered wigwam, or light up the ashes over his deserted altars.

Yon star that leads westward has no halting-place for him till it sets on the calm Pacific, writing on its blue waters the history of a people that have perished.

It was a lovely morning. The sun rose from its nightly course, radiant with beauty, kissing the dew from the tiny cups of the myriad flowers, tinging with gold the emerald leaves of the forest, and gilding the crests of a thousand little billows that were just waking to life in the shaded pools of the mountain streams. It was a scene of wondrous loveliness—a scene that the eye might willingly rest upon forever, while the soul drank in its freshness till satiated with the very excess of beauty. A scene like that the pen or pencil of man are impatient to portray. The Master Artist—God! upon the canvass of his own created world, has alone written it out.

Under one of those picturesque clumps of trees that broke the luxuriant monotony of the rolling grass-land, a corral of covered wagons had been drawn up for the night, and now stood with the canvass swaying in the breeze, circling a snowy little tent which had been pitched against the trunk of a noble tulip-tree, and stood beneath its deep-green branches like a great white bird rested on the grass.

The little camp had formed itself late the night before, and the deep breathing of many a stalwart sleeper came from the covered wagons, while the guard kept his post yet, but with a weary fall of the body and a wistful look at the wagons; for he envied the sleepers there with all the earnestness of a tired man.

In the midst of the stillness, the covering of the pretty white tent began to flutter, as if the great bird it represented so much were stirring its plumage; first one curtain was lifted, then another, and after a little peeped forth one of the most beautiful faces you ever set eyes on—only the more beautiful because her hair, black as a crow's plumage, hung in great undulating waves down her shoulders, just as she had dropped it, half-braided, when tired of holding its weight in her small hands. It was a radiant face, rich with health and fine

coloring. Her brown eyes—sometimes black when she was excited, but of a warm, loving brown now—cast a bright glance out upon the morning, the curtain fell again, there was a fluttering motion of life within the tent, then all the canvass was flung back from the front, and as queenly a young creature as you ever saw stepped out upon the trampled sward. In form and face the girl was something wonderful to look upon; and now that her hair was coiled in a raven braid around her head, and her figure was clearly defined by a close-fitting dress of richly-toned calico, there was an air of high breeding in her carriage singularly at variance with the scene around her.

Some clusters of wild blossoms grew within the circle of the wagons still untrampled and pure. She saw them drooping heavily beneath a rain of dew, and going up to them, swept the drops off with her hands, thus taking a morning bath which was half moisture, half perfume.

“Now,” she said, looking around upon the green undulations of the prairie, “now for a straggle among the flowers. One never gets a lonely walk when we are on the move. I am tired of being forever cautioned to keep close to the wagons. Now for the prairie. How the green waves rise and swell to the morning wind. It is like launching forth on an ocean. It seems as if one could swim through the grass.”

Esther Morse—this was her name—ran back to the tent and brought forth a pretty straw hat, very coarse, but so garnished with crimson ribbons that it had a look of dainty sumptuousness, which she carried away by the strings. Thus she left the camp, singing as she went, but in a low voice that harmonized with the gush of bird-songs that swelled through the morning.

Esther passed the almost sleeping guard, who, tired with his night of watchfulness against the prowling Utes, was leaning noddingly upon his rifle. She flashed upon his sight rather as some visitor from starry climes than that compound of earth we call woman.

“’Tain’t my business, Miss Esther,” he muttered, more to himself than her, “but who knows what red-skins may be a-watchin’ over behind them rocks yender.”

“Never fear for me, Abel Cummings,” replied the girl, cheerfully and with a sweet smile upon her face; “I only want

to take a short walk in the grass. Never fear for me, I will be back long before breakfast is ready."

"If ever thar was an angel thar goes one," soliloquized the man as she passed him.

And on she rambled, far beyond the usual limits prescribed by camp regulations. Well might a poetic fancy be lured by such a scene. The cloud-crowned caps of the Wind River Mountains loomed ghost-like in the rare, blue air—the sloping prairie around was green in its spring freshness—the foliage, that marked the river's tide, glitteringly bright, and the just rising sun throwing over all its rare and delicate sheen of golden-vermilion. These before, and above, and around; while behind, the tented wagons dotted the greensward, looking as if a fairy caravan had encamped in a new Eden.

Careless of all danger—thinking but of the glorious scene around her, Esther Morse stepped rapidly over the rolling ground and soon was lost to sight. Now and then she paused and stooped to examine some dainty bud, and then, as if anxious to make the most of her time, pressed forward again. The plash of swiftly-running waters greets her ears, and soon she stoops over the sparkling tide which came surging over a pile of rocks. Well might she look in the pool below. Such rare beauty was never mirrored before in that sylvan looking-glass; the foot of a being so fit to be the sovereign of the scene never before trod the mossy brink. She cools her brow with the spray, and the foam-beads flash amid the blackness of her luxuriant hair. She bends still more closely over the silvery tide, and can almost count the snowy pebbles beneath. A bird flits by and she listens to its song for a moment, but to send back a reply still more sweet. An antelope stays its rapid course for an instant, upon the opposite bank, to gaze upon her with its pensive eyes, ere its hoofs, swift almost as light, ring a merry chorus as it speeds away, buoyant with innocent life. Truly it is a bower of beauty—a very paradise in the far distant wilderness. The spirit of evil should indeed forbear to set his foot or leave his serpent trail in a place like that.

Hark! Like the aroused stag her ear is bent to listen. She holds her breath and stands poised for flight. Is it the wind playing idly among the branches—the stir of her father's

train preparing for their onward march—the rush and thunder of the buffalo herd, or the stealthy tread and long, shambling gallop of the gaunt, gray wolf? Is it the step of some one sent in pursuit of her—some one to guard her against danger—or—and the very thought sent a thrill of fear quivering through her entire frame—is it, can it be the wily savage seeking for plunder, prisoners, perhaps scalps?

Little time did she give herself for thought, but with a quick, startled glance around she turned to go; but with the first step confronted an Indian girl standing in her very path. To pass her and rush to the camp before the red warriors could cut her off from the way, appeared to be her only hope; but even as she hurried past, the skirt of her dress was caught and retained, while a not unmusical voice whispered, in strangely broken accents:

“Look. Me no enemy to you. Look! Has the pale-face no thought of the Laramie? The memory of the white squaw is not true like the heart of the red one.”

In a moment the swiftly-retreating blood flowed back to Esther's heart. She recognized the Indian girl as one whom she had slightly befriended weeks before.

“The white squaw good to me. She has no forgotten?” asked the Indian girl, or rather wife, for she was in fact the bride of a dusky chief of the Sioux.

In the bright sunlight, as she stood there waiting to be recognized, this Indian woman was the very incarnation of that rare, almost spiritual beauty sometimes to be found among the daughters of the red-men. Slight, yet tall, with movements so perfectly graceful that they approached those of a leopard; with a small foot, whose richly-ornamented moccasins fell light, almost, as the dew upon the prairie-blossoms: with long, black hair, knotted with scraps of gorgeous ribbon, she stood before Esther. Her eyes, large, lustrous and pensive as those of the antelope, were fixed upon the young girl. You would not have thought, from the expression at the moment, that they could be piercing as the sun-gazing eagle, when insult or danger aroused the slumbering passions of uneducated nature. With that look, and a voice flute-like and musical, it would have been strange indeed if she could so soon have been forgotten.

"Yes," replied Esther, "I remember you well; but what could have brought you so far from your tribe? You Indian women are not used, I think, to stray away from your wigwams or leave your husbands."

"Waupee has no husband," was the response of the young wife.

"No husband! What do you mean? It is not a month since I saw you the bride of a great warrior—high in power and famous on the hunting-path."

"One day there came to the wigwam of the Black Eagle a woman fair as a white rose. The warrior forgot Waupee, his wife, and his heart turned to the white rose. Waupee has no husband."

"Waupee—White Hawk—what story is this? What do you mean?"

"The warrior can not see the moon when the sun is showering its golden arrows to the earth."

"Why talk to me in this ambiguous manner? Speak plainly, so that I may understand."

"The Black Eagle of the Sioux has feasted his eyes on the beauty of the pale-face."

"On me? You can not mean me?"

"The tongue has traveled the trail of truth."

"But it is folly—madness! He will never see me again. I shall soon be forgotten, Waupee, and then all will be well with you again."

"The red-man never forgets."

"And you have traveled so far—so many long miles, to tell me of this—to tell me that—"

"The wigwam of Waupee is desolate."

"But you must have had some other motive. It can not be this alone could bring you so far."

"Let the daughter of the pale-face bend her head so low that Waupee can whisper to her. The woods have ears, the flowers hearken, and the trees drink in words."

"What mystery—what new fear is this? Tell me quickly, for my heart leaps wildly in terror of some danger that you know of."

"The Black Eagle of the Sioux is flying swiftly upon the trail of the pale-face he would have for his mate!"

"Horror! Even now he may be concealed between me and my father's camp. Thanks, thanks, good Waupee, and—"

"Hark!" and the Indian woman laid her ear close to the ground and listened for some time in silence. Then rising, she continued: "The earth is thundering beneath the hoofs of swift-running horses, but they are still afar. Let the daughter of the pale-face hasten to her people, and never again let her moccasin wander. The eye of the Black Eagle is keen, his wings swift, his talons sharp, and his heart knows neither pity or fear."

"And you, Waupee?"

"The Great Spirit directs me. The poor Indian woman has risked her life to save you, for you were kind to her. But now—" she started suddenly as if serpent-stung, and without another word disappeared in the thick undergrowth.

Left to herself, the white girl paused but for a moment—a single one, as if to consider her nearest and most secure path to the camp, then darted off, with the swiftness of a frightened deer. Now and then she listened intently, while pausing to gather breath, and once, in passing, bent over the swift-running water that washed the green grasses and tiny flowers at her feet, attracted, even in her flight, by some unwonted object.

Was it the eyes of a basilisk that so enchained her? What was the form, but half hid by the drooping bushes, that robbed her cheeks of their healthy red and brought a cry of anguish to her quivering lips. Do demons lave their black limbs in the limpid waters of the mountain streams, or forms Plutonian sport where the salmon should alone flash its silver sides?

The waters parted with a turbulent dash, and a dark form arose, dripping like a water-god, before her. It was Black Eagle, of the Sioux.

"Ugh!" The arms of the Indian were extended, his eyes flashed with the fires of savage triumph. He gathered her up from where she stood white as death and frozen with fear, and, as a hawk seizes rudely on its prey, bore her off.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE'S NOBLEMAN—WALTERMYER.

"ABEL CUMMINGS, what are you a-doing there, my good man? Come, be stirring;" and the speaker issued from a large wagon near at hand.

"Doin', Squire? Only lookin' out to see if I could see any thing of Miss Esther. But it ain't of no use, for she's gone clear out of sight," replied the man, addressing the owner of the train, and the father of the wandering girl.

"You might be in better business than spying after a runaway girl. Let her go. Hunger will soon bring her back again, I'll warrant. So stir around—wake up the men, and have every thing ready for a start."

"But, Squire, they say that thar's lots an' lots of Indians a-skulkin' around, and who knows but that they may carry Miss Esther off and—"

"Eat her up, I suppose!" interrupted the parent, with a hearty laugh.

Checked in his speech, the man turned sullenly away, and in the bustle of the hour had soon forgotten his fears. So, indeed, it was with the majority, if they had in fact any curiosity about a young creature who had always been accustomed to wander at will and without restraint. But, careless as the father apparently was, he often turned his eyes in the direction pointed out by the man, and grew more and more troubled that she did not return.

Strange, very strange it would have been if that father had not been anxious, for she was all that remained to him of a beloved family. Wife and sons had fallen victims to the terrible reaper of the scythe and hour-glass, as he swept in a fearful epidemic through the land. This beautiful daughter was now his sole idol. Heart-sick, he had turned his back upon the place of his birth—gathered up his means, and, following the westering star, had determined to make for himself a new home in the regions "where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound save its own dashings."

The breakfast-hour arrived and still the girl came not; passed, and she had not appeared. The time of starting was delayed, until a feeling of intense uneasiness—a vague sense of danger, took possession of every heart. Anxious eyes were strained prairie-ward, but in vain. No flutter of dress or springing step told of her coming. Once, only, moving life appeared in the distance: they saw a troop of horse sweeping over a far-off eminence—wild horse they must have been, for none bore riders. For one moment they flashed before their eyes, floundering madly on, and then were lost in a cloud of whirling dust, which alone told of their passage.

Simple as the incident was, they remembered it well in the hereafter.

“Saddle up your best horses, boys!”

The order came with startling sternness, for the heart of that poor father was now sorely troubled.

“Abel Cummings, lead the way. You saw her last, and should be a sure guide.”

“Waal, Squire, yes; but, yer see—”

“Silence! This is no time for words. Action, man, prompt and decisive action may save my child; nothing else. A hundred silver dollars to him who first brings me news of her. Mount and forward! Mount all, except those who guard the wagons. Mount and—”

A little cloud of dust, scarcely larger than an infant's hand, arose suddenly in the distance, whirling in eddies aloft, and checking further speech, for in those regions slight causes often produced events of the most startling character. Who could tell that this little cloud of dust might not be caused by the hoofs of a savage band, resolved on robbery, if not murder!

Without waiting for commands, the circular line of the corral was again formed, the cattle and horses secured within, and each man, fully armed, at his post. Then every eye was turned upon the prairie, eager to learn what the cloud might portend.

Nearer, still nearer, it came, as if lightning were trailing its red flashes along the earth, searing the foliage as it passed and leaving only a train of whirling dust behind. Nearer it came, and soon the beating of each heart was less fitful,

and every rifle was dropped from its poise. Nearer—still nearer, and two horsemen came bounding up the slope, “bloody with spurring, fiery red with speed.”

The foremost—for his good steed, though held in check, came many lengths ahead—was mounted on a horse of great power. With the exception of a single snowy spot in his forehead, the superb animal was black from hoof to fore-top. He cleared the earth with great, vigorous bounds, his thin, open nostrils red as coral, his head matchless in its symmetry, ears delicate and pointed, and tail and mane waving like twin banners in the breeze. With a firm, yet light hand, the rider controlled his slightest motion, and guided him at will. When he had reached the corral, and the rider flung himself carelessly to the ground, there was not a quivering of the limbs or heaving flank to tell of the rapid race he had just finished.

“Who and what are you?” demanded Miles Morse, as the new-comer glanced around and appeared to take in the entire scene with a single look, while every eye was riveted upon him.

Well might these men gaze upon the new-comer both in admiration and surprise, for a more superb specimen of the Western hunter and border scout never trod the earth. More than six feet in height, with long black hair, and a thick beard sprinkled with gray, an aquiline nose, and eyes piercing and restless as the eagle's, he was a man well worth remembering as a noble specimen of the class.

His dress was the usual picturesque costume, formed mostly of doeskin, curiously fringed and embroidered. His hat was the true slouch—“rough and ready,” with a gold band glittering around it. He held a long rifle in one hand, while pistols and a knife bristled defiantly in his belt. As he stood stroking the arched neck of his good horse, you saw the very *beau idéal* of that pioneer race who, scorning the ease and fashionable fetters of city life, have laid the foundation of new States in the unexplored regions of the giant West, and dashed onward in search of new fields of enterprise, leaving the great results to be gathered by the settlers that come slowly after him. There he stood, leaning against his horse, lithe as a panther, fearless as a poor honorable

man may well be after he has, companionless, traversed the trackless desert, and fought the grizzly bear in his own fastnesses.

"Who am I, stranger?" he said, with something like a smile. "May be you have heard of Kirk Waltermyer?"

"Waltermyer? I think I have heard your name before."

"Heard of me, stranger? Why, I am well known from the pines of Oregon to the chapparel of Texas. Ask La Moine, there, if we haven't danced at every fandango, hunted in every thicket, and trapped on every stream."

His companion, whom he had called La Moine, was a tough and wiry specimen of the half-breed Frenchman, so often found among the north-western hunters and voyageurs—a man of but few words, but true as steel to a friend, and implacable in his hate of an enemy.

"Yes, I have heard of you," continued Morse. "I remember, now, and was expecting to find you somewhere in the vicinity of Salt Lake. I was told you could guide me by the best route to the Walla Walla valley."

"I guide you!" and the weather-bronzed man laughed in a reckless and heart-whole manner. "I guide you? Why, stranger, I could do it blindfolded."

"Well, I believe you, but we'll talk of it another time. First, let me ask what brought you here?"

"Why, my good horse—the best-limbed, swiftest, surest horse on the perarar. None of your mustangs, that, stranger, but a full-blooded cretur, worth his weight in diamonds."

"I know that; but your business? From what I learned about you, this is not your usual trail."

"Waal, it hain't, that's a fact; but some of the skulkin' followers of that devil-worshiper, Brigham Young, ukered me out of nigh a hundred head, and I'm not the man to play such games with, sure as you live."

"Hundred head? What do you mean?"

"Ha! ha! Waal, you must'er come from the tother side of sunrise. Head? Why, cattle, to be sure; but they didn't steal them, for they knew my rifle had a rayther imperlite way of speakin' its mind, so they bought them and have forgot to pay."

"I understand. And now, listen to me. My daughter wandered away from the camp early this morning and has not returned. I fear that—"

"La Moine," interrupted Waltermyer, somewhat rudely, while the cheerful expression of his face changed into a frown as black as a thunder-cloud, and his entire nature appeared to have assumed a stern purpose, "La Moine, do you remember the red rascals we saw dashing over the perarer like so many frightened wild horses? I told you thar was something wrong—that some traveler had lost his stock or something worse had happened. Which way did the girl take, stranger?"

"There—toward the timber."

"And some skulkin', thievin' savage was lyin' in ambush for her, I'll bet a dozen beaver-skins. La Moine, go with—who saw her last—you, man?—well, go with him and see if you can find the trail." As the Frenchman departed, accompanied by Abel Cummings, he continued: "Ef thar ever was a man that was part hound, had the hearing of a deer and the cunning of a fox, thar he goes;" and he stripped the heavy saddle from his horse, took the bit from his mouth, and allowed him to graze at will.

A half-hour—which appeared very long to the watchers—and the two men returned.

"Waal, La Moine?"

"The girl has been carried off, Waltermyer, that's sartin. But one Indian did it. Thar is the print of another moccasin, but it is a little one—that of a squaw. I should say that the white gal and the squaw had been talkin' together, and after they had separated, some Indian devil of a warrior jumped from an ambush—dragged the gal inter the stream and across it—found his braves waitin', and after lifting the gal inter a saddle, off they went like so many black thieves."

"Ef you say so, it is so, and I'll swear to it."

"We saw a troop of horses in the distance," said the father, "but as they had no riders, thought they must have been wild ones. No, no! they could never have carried Indians."

"Not them!" replied Waltermyer, "not them! Why, man, any boy that ever saw a perarer could have told you how it was. They were hiding behind their horses—with only one

foot thrown over the saddles, if they had any at all, while the girl was bound down and kept on the further side. It's too old a trick to fool any one. But which way were they going, the prowlin' wolves carryin' off young lambs? West, were they? They will strike for the South Pass; but what in the name of common sense should take them thar with a stolen girl?"

No one appeared competent to solve the question, and all was silence until the Frenchman—for so he habitually called himself, notwithstanding his Indian blood—whispered in the ear of Waltermyer the single word "Mormons."

"Right, man! Right for a thousand slugs! Stranger, did you come by the way of Laramie?"

"Certainly, we stayed there a number of days."

"War thar any followers of the holy prophet—as the infernal sinners call themselves, though I call them thieves—around?"

"A large train. We left them there."

"And they saw your girl?"

"Every day. Several of them visited us. One in particular came often and appeared very anxious to converse with us."

"What sort of man was he?"

"Large, rather good-looking, and a plausible and gentlemanly appearing man."

"With black hair, as smooth as my colt's skin, and a scar on one cheek?"

"Yes. I remember it distinctly."

"I know him, stranger."

"You! But that is not improbable."

"I'll bet my rifle I do, and a bigger Satan never disgraced the name of man. He's a hull mule train in rascality, that man is. It isn't the first of his infernal capers that I have been knowing to, and unless you travel swift you may make up your mind to find your daughter in that serpent's nest, Salt Lake City."

"Heaven keep her from it! Death, even, would be a blessing compared to that."

"Amen to that, stranger, and ef you had seen and knew as much as I do you would say it with your hull heart."

"What can be done to save her Waltermyer? She is my

only child—all that is left to me. You will help a father in his worst troubles? Go with me—help me and name your price—any thing, all, I possess shall be yours, if you save her.”

“Stranger, I will go. Thar’s my hand on it, and though I say it who shouldn’t, it’s just as honest a hand as thar is on the frontier, and never yet took money for a kindness.”

“I know it—I believe it.”

“Then don’t talk to me of pay. Kirk Waltermyer ain’t no Digger Indian, or yaller greaser to take blood-money. If thar is any thing, stranger, that would have kept me from lendin’ you a helpin’ hand it is that same offer to pay.”

“Forgive me and forget. Trouble—this terrible trouble, should outweigh my mistake.”

“And so it does. Besides, you didn’t know any better. You men who are brought up in cities and have your souls cramped up between brick walls—who buy and sell one another like horses, don’t know what it is to live out human freedom on the perarers—to enjoy life—to be MEN! But we are losin’ time. Let half a dozen of your best men mount their swiftest horses, arm themselves to the teeth and follow me. La Moine, you stay, guide the train to Fort Bridger and wait thar until you hear from me. Every hour we can gain now is worth a day to us. Come, stranger, don’t get down-hearted. Kirk Waltermyer will see your girl righted or thar shall be more howlin’ and prayin’ in Salt Lake than Brigham Young ever got up at one of his powows.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before he had whistled his horse to his side, saddled and bridled him, flung himself on his back, and was dashing away with the perfect grace and horsemanship of an Arapahoe. Rude as he was in speech and manner—unlettered and unrefined—a purer diamond never yet was concealed in any man’s breast than the heart of Waltermyer.

CHAPTER III.

THE APOSTLE.

THE followers of Joseph Smith, the martyr to his own fanaticism, were traveling slowly, like the Israelites of old, from their ruined homes in Illinois to the far-off Salt Lake. On the night in which our story deals with them, they had pitched their tents for the night on the grassy banks of the Sweet Water river. Before them loomed up Independence Rock, like some castellated tower of feudal times—grand, hoary, grim and picturesque. Beyond was the “Devil’s Gate,” through which they would soon have to pass. A strikingly appropriate name this for the passage that was to usher them to the valley of the “Saints” beyond! He who named it must have been gifted with prophetic wisdom with regard to the people who were to travel it in after days.

The scene was attractive, even beautiful, for these people wandered like the Patriarchs of old, with flocks and herds, pitching their tents in the wilderness. The last rays of the sun struck with slanting light the canvass homes, tinging them with dusky gold. The cheerful hum of busy labor rose healthfully on the breeze. The song of the maidens while milking the cows—the prattle of little children—the gay laughter of young people and the tones of manly voices swelled together—an anthem of toil. Bright fires were already sending their smoke on high, wreathing in fanciful coils and drifting through the air, tinged with a glorious brightness like thunder-clouds when the sun strikes them. Busy mothers bent over the coals, preparing the evening meal, while their husbands wheeled the heavy wagons into a circle, and formed a temporary fort, calculated to protect them from attack from without, and stam-pede within. The air was soft, and the clouds mottled, dolphin-like, changing as the sun went down into deeper hues of crimson, gold and purple. The trees were aflame—the swiftly-running stream, molten silver—the burning death-fires of the day had flooded the earth with evanescent bright-
ness.

“Showered the maples with celestial red ;
The oaks were sunsets—though the day was dead ;
The green was gold—the willows drooped in wine ;
The ash was fire—the humblest shrub divine ;
The aspen quivered in a silver stream.”

Amid all this loveliness, selfish passions were at work, striving for their own ends, with a deluded people toiling on to erect a molten calf in the wilderness to be worshiped in the place of the true God !

But the smoke of the evening fires became thin, and faded away ; the glowing coals died out amid the whitened ashes. The children, innocent as yet, thank Heaven, had passed into the sweet dreams that infancy alone can know, and the elders gathered to hear the mockery of an evening service, to profane that almost holy solitude with the idolatry of a purely sensual religion.

The master-spirit rose, the beguiling serpent who had lured these ignorant men and women from their quiet homes in the old world, and desecrated the quiet of that lovely evening with his pointless ravings—inflammatory pictures of the “promised land” that should soon dawn upon their longing eyes ; all the blasphemous teachings of a wily brain.

A man, subtle in his nature and in his speech—with a superfluity of words, and gifted with the low cunning of an adroit impostor, he yet was looked up to as one on whom the sacred mantle of “the prophet” had fallen. Practice, and his own nature had enabled him to assimilate himself with the peculiar ideas of those he wished to influence—to lower himself to any level, and cunningly use it for his own selfish ends and personal aggrandizement.

Nature had done much toward enabling him to become the living lie he was. In youth his figure had been fine and his face attractive ; and though years had told upon the one, rendering it somewhat coarse, and evil thoughts had plowed unmistakable furrows upon the other, enough of early grace and manly beauty remained to enforce the iniquity of his doctrines.

With great unction and show of reverence his discourse was delivered ; the sweet strains of the evening hymns rolled forth, echoed by the rocky reverberations of the grand old hills afar off : the smouldering fires were extinguished ; the guards

placed, and silence settled down upon the shores of the Sweet Water.

But Elelu Thomas—for so the prophet was named—had no inclination for sleep. His tent had been pitched apart from the others, and with little difficulty and no fear of observation he could make his way from the corral into the open prairie.

Alone, if one filled with evil thoughts can ever be alone, he sat for a long time. No sweet memories gathered around his heart and thronged the mystic cells of the brain. No tender recollections flashed, fairy-footed, through the halls of thought, but unholy fancies alone had power with him.

"Yes," he muttered, between his closely compressed lips; "Yes. The plan will work to a charm. Never yet has a human soul escaped me. This shall be the master-stroke of my life. Hark! No, no, it is not what I long to hear. It is but the half-suppressed song with which the sentinel cheats the long hours. But it is so near midnight—the poor fools who have so blindly followed and given me their gold are asleep—dreaming, perhaps, of the bright valley I have so often told them of. What a waking there will be soon! Well, well, it is necessary to keep up the delusion, and I would be but a fool like them to kill the goose that lays my golden eggs."

The man opened a trunk upon which he had been seated, took out some arms, and cautiously left the tent. He crept stealthily through the wagons, skirted along them, half hid by the shadows, and gained the woods unobserved.

"Rare sentinels these," he thought. "To-morrow I will teach them a lesson that they will not soon forget. But here is the spot, and—"

A touch upon his arm caused his cowardly soul to leap to his lips, while a deep voice whispered in his ears:

"The pale chief watches not well the stars."

"Ah! Black Eagle, is that you?"

"The red-man has been waiting. When the moon first touched the tops of the trees he was to be here. It's light is now creeping down the trunks."

"Yes, I know I am late, but now that I am here tell me how you have succeeded?"

"Has the pale-face forgotten his promise?"

"No; here is the gold; the rest you shall have at the proper time. Now, about your mission."

"He who would keep should watch also. When the fawn wanders far from the horns of the buck, the wolves are soon on its trail."

"Yes, yes; but tell me plainly what you mean."

"The eye of Black Eagle is keen, his arm is strong and his horse swift."

"Bah! with your Indian circumlocution. Tell me about the girl, man. Have you got her?"

"There is mourning and blackened faces in the wigwam of her tribe."

"You have carried her off then?"

"As the eagle of the mountains does the young dove of the valley."

"And you brought her here? Here? Where is she, man?"

"Not like the children of the prairies can the pale squaw ride. She is feeble as the little pappoose, and her heart is sick as the snake-charmed bird."

"What of it?" and a dark frown settled on the face of the speaker. "Why did you not bind her to a horse and bring her here at all hazards? My people would have tended her as—"

"The wolf the lamb."

A strange speech that, to come from a nomadic, red warrior, and the eye of the white man quailed under the the fiery glance fastened upon him.

"Well, yes, something like it," he replied, trying to conceal his feelings under an unpleasant laugh. "But where is the girl?"

"In the lodges of the Sioux."

"I must see her this very night."

"Has the pale-face become a child? Is he a woman, that he forgets the thoughts of yesterday, and would, like the serpent, sting itself to the death?"

"No, no. I had forgotten the plan for a moment. She is safe, you say?"

"As the beaver in the iron-tooth trap."

"And her father knows nothing of the trail—who carried her off—when or where?"

"The red-man leaves his footsteps in the running water ; it rolls over them and they are gone."

"Keep watch of her, then, as you would guard the very apple of your eye, for she is to my heart as the 'rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley.'" The old hypocrisy would break out from his impious lips, and the deception of a lifetime found utterance even when his soul was unmasked.

"The lodge of the red-man is as safe as the log war-house of the pale-face."

"Well, you know the plan. In the roughest part of the cañon—even in the 'Devil's Gate,' as the children of the world call it, I will be prepared to rush down upon you and rescue her. She will be grateful, for her heart is warm and loving. Be sure you are at the appointed spot at the right time, and then—"

He had half turned away from his companion, and on looking for the Black Eagle again, found himself alone. Silent as had been the coming of the Indian was his departure. With a mind filled with conflicting emotions, the impostor turned back again toward the encampment. Very little faith had he in the fidelity of Black Eagle, for his own treacherous heart made him suspicious of others, and this, added to the well-known character of the red-man, made him fear the result. Reaching the corral in safety, he crept through the barricades made by the wagons, and was soon sleeping calmly as the most innocent child in the encampment. Looking on that man, you might have fancied that some angel's prayers had showered poppy leaves around him, and some kind hand had held to his lips a balmy nepenthe against all the trials, cares and passions of life.

When guilt sleeps, then let the pure in heart rejoice. But what a strange anomaly it is, when an evil nature can throw off its corroding fetters—its whirlwind passions, debasing influences, and slumber like untainted childhood—that even the most depraved can for a time change the entire current of their lives, and, touched by the leaden wand, become oblivious of their own wickedness. "To the pure, all things are pure," and a very paradox it is that sin, when slumbering, can throw off the crushing millstone and wander like innocence joyously among the roses.

The Indian, when he had secured the gold of his infamous patron, and noiselessly departed, struck at once into the middle of the stream, and dropping into the current, swam leisurely down, till he reached the shadow of an overhanging rock. Here he drew his lithe form cautiously up, shook the water from his garments, and then plunged into the thicket.

His savage nature had mapped out the path he was to follow, and no meddling fancies were allowed to intrude upon him. A double purpose he had in view—gain, and the gratification of his own selfish purposes. The tenets of his savage religion offered no bar to their accomplishment, and he knew quite as little of conscience as his employer.

An hour later, and just as the sun was lighting the fleecy clouds, and all nature sung its first song of praise for the coming day, Black Eagle emerged from the forest, many miles distant, and entered the camp of his followers.

CHAPTER IV.

CLAUDE AND ELLEN.

THE great West has its villas and palaces now crowding out the log-cabins of thirty years ago. You find them sheltered superbly by the ancient forest-trees, and surrounded by velvet lawns, through which the wild prairie-flowers will peep out and make an effort at their old free blossoming, but only to be uprooted for the hot-house roses and fuchsias of other climes.

In one of these luxurious dwellings lived the La Clides, the most refined and wealthy family to be found in the neighborhood of St. Louis. The owner, a young man, not yet four and twenty, and his mother, and his mother, one of the most beautiful women of her time, occupied this noble dwelling, and the vast wealth which had been left to their control was day by day expended in making it still more beautiful.

Claude La Clide's grandfather had been a French fur-trader, when western enterprise of this kind yielded enormous profits.

Like many of his class, he married among the Indians, choosing for his forest-bride a daughter of the Dacotahs, as the tribe loved to call itself, or more commonly in their savage relations, Ochente Shacoan—the nation of the Seven Council Fires—though by the white traders they were designated as Sioux.

The fur-trader soon accumulated a fortune in his profitable traffic, and having buried his Indian wife in the forest, took his only child, a daughter, back to St. Louis to be educated.

There La Clide invested his money in real estate, which rapidly rose in value, and, almost without an effort or a wish, he became one of the richest men of the West. While his daughter was in her first youth, the fur-trader died, leaving her his great wealth in direct possession.

Two years after her father's death, a young French gentleman, impoverished and exiled for his participation in one of those revolutions which are constantly scattering the old families of France into strange lands, came to St. Louis. He was a man of peculiar refinement, handsome and modest as refined men usually are. He met the young heiress. Her beauty, the shy, wild grace inherited from her mother, softened and toned down by education, fascinated him at once. She was something so fresh, so unlike the females of his own world, that her very presence was full of romance to the young exile. She loved him and they were married.

La Clide brought all his taste and knowledge of architecture into action, when a new home for his bride was built near the town, and yet removed from its bustle and crowds. It commanded a fine view of the monarch river, whose eternal flow could be heard from the veranda and balconies when the day was quiet. Its stone walls were soon draped with the choicest climbing plants. Passion flowers twined in and out through the stone carvings of the balconies, roses curtained the windows. Great forest-trees waved their branches over the roof, and clothed the distant grounds, and above all, love reigned within—that quiet, deep love for which a man or woman is so grateful to God that it breaks forth in thanksgiving with every smile and word.

But not even love can stay the black-winged angel. He came one night when the first tinge of silver had crept into

the husband's brown locks, found the mysterious mechanism of the heart diseased, and gently stopped its beating. So, without one sigh or word of farewell to the beloved wife slumbering by his side, he passed away.

Never was grief so sacred or so quiet as that which fell upon the mistress of that residence when she found herself alone, the guardian of a young son, and a widow forevermore. She had been a proud woman in married life—proud of her husband, proud of her beauty for his sake, and, oh, how more than proud of his noble son, her only child. The fiery Indian blood that ran in her veins, and gave that splendid brunette complexion, was no bar to her reception in society with the people of St. Louis, for an intermarriage with the Indians had been no uncommon thing with the first settlers, and in her the savage blood was so graced with refinement that it was forgotten even by the new-comers, who had begun to bring their prejudices beyond the great river.

But enterprise and civilization, as it concentrated in the neighborhood, had sometimes shot its poisoned arrows at this noble woman, and a shrinking thought that there might be something in her Dacotah blood to wound the pride of her son, or impede his generous ambition, had silently taken force in her nature.

But there was nothing in this to disturb her position as a leader of society. In her husband's lifetime his house had been the center of all that was intellectual and of worth in society for miles and miles around. A genial hospitality had won the talented and the good to his roof. The widow permitted no change in this. All that her husband had thought right became a religion with her. All that he had been, all that he had enjoyed, should reappear in her son.

Was it wonderful that she almost worshiped the young man as he grew so like his father in expression and voice, so like herself in the rare beauty of his person?

Five years of widowhood, and this idol of her life had become perfect in his manliness. The raven hair of his grandmother, but softened, finer and glossy, fell in thick waves over his forehead. The tall, lithe form, erect and graceful, the eagle eye, the proud poise of the head, were splendid in their regal beauty; while the soft, olive-tinged

skin, warmed by the flashing blood of his transatlantic father, the tender light that sometimes filled his eyes, the blush that flushed his pure forehead, were perfect in their blending of refined and savage beauty. Just enough of the wild grace and *insouciance* of his Indian ancestry had been mingled with the pure blood of the old French nobility to render this young man strikingly beautiful in person and most alluring in mind.

La Clide's physical education had been perfect. A more fearless horseman could not be found, even in his grandmother's tribe; yet, in the dance he was quiet and graceful, his walk remarkable only for its stately ease. Like his person was that proud, tender and fiery nature. No frown could swerve him from the right, no allurements win him to the wrong. He neither gave offense nor brooked insult. Love, with him, was a sacred passion; women, creatures that stood half way between him and the angels, not worth winning save by aspiration. And this man was in love. That pure, strong heart had been given away blindly, as such hearts will sometimes go from their own keeping. He had been accepted, and was now betrothed.

One spring evening, when the perfume came sweetest from the balcony which opened from his mother's sitting-room, the young man came in from the city. Springing from his horse, he tossed the bridle to an attendant, flung his whip after it, and entered the house. The moss-like carpets smothered the sound of his heavy footsteps, or the mother must have guessed at his agitation before he reached her.

As it was, Mrs. La Clide sat quietly amid the cushions of her easy-chair, reading. Even in his passion the young man paused a moment to regard her; with those surroundings she broke upon him so like a picture of the old masters. The walls of that room were lined in every part by richly-bound volumes that gleamed out richly in the first twilight. Near the broad sashes that opened into the balcony, two statues, a bacchantic and a graceful dancing-girl, were holding back the frost-like lace of the curtains, allowing the light to fall on that calm face, surmounted by its coronal of braided hair.

Was he mistaken, or did that face look paler than usual? Was it pain or thought that drew those beautiful brows together?

This anxious thought held the anger with which he had entered the house in abeyance. He stepped forward.

"Mother!"

She started and dropped her book, pressed one hand suddenly against her heart, and gasped out:

"Well, my son."

"Are you reading? Have I frightened you?"

"Reading? No, I only held the book. One falls into thought sometimes, forgetting every thing."

La Clide took up the volume she had dropped. It was a medical book, and had fallen upon the floor open at a treatise on diseases of the heart.

"Why, mother, what is this?"

"That? Oh, nothing. It chanced to be on the table. But what is the matter? You look strangely, Claude."

"Do I? Very likely, mother, for I come to tell you that I can never marry Ellen Worthington."

"My son—my son! Another lover's quarrel—is that all?"

"It is no lover's quarrel. But she is heartless—my wishes are nothing to her."

"Heartless, dear Claude. I think you do the girl wrong."

"No, mother. She treats our engagement as if it were a spider's web, to be swept through with a dash of her hand. Not an hour ago I saw her in the most public street of St. Louis, leaning on the arm of that miserable gambler, young Houston."

"No, no. It can not be so bad as that."

"Worse than that; she was hanging lovingly on his arm, while he bent and whispered—yes, mother, whispered in her ear."

Mrs. La Clide seemed surprised; but she was a good woman, too good for hasty conclusions. She thought a moment, and answered her son gently.

"Ellen may be giddy, my son. That is a fault of youth, and she is young. But I think—I am sure she loves you."

"She loves the wealth I have, and the position we can give her."

"Now you are harsh, Claude."

"Harsh? No woman trifles with the man she loves."

"Yes, dear; sometimes in mere thoughtlessness."

"But when her fault has been more than once pointed out?"

"Perhaps you have not done it with sufficient gentleness. We are sometimes haughty in our demands without knowing it."

"You are kind—very kind, mother. All this would console me if I did not know how resolutely Ellen has persisted in disregarding my wishes—if I did not know that she has attempted to conceal her intimacy with this man from me."

"Is this really so, Claude?"

"Would I make the charge if it were not true?"

"Miss Worthington!"

In their excitement, the mother and son had not heard the colored waiter, and his voice startled them when he announced the very person they were talking of.

"Show her in here," said the mother, seating herself, and again pressing a hand to her side.

The man retired, and directly a light voice and the flutter of a pretty muslin dress came through the outer room.

"Where are you, my beautiful mamma that is to be? Oh, Claude, I did not expect to find you here," cried the golden-haired beauty, turning her deep blue eyes upon him. "Wait one moment, while I kiss your mother."

Down she fell upon her knees, winding one arm around Mrs. La Clide, and holding up her rosebud mouth for a kiss, which the elder lady gave her very gravely.

"There, now!"

She started up, drew the perfumed glove from her hand, and held it toward him, glowing from its imprisonment.

"What, you will not take my hand?" she cried, turning away to use the hand in smoothing the braids of her hair. "Never mind; it isn't a butterfly, to settle twice in the same spot;" and, with a careless movement of the head, she ran for a cushion and sat down at Mrs. La Clide's feet. "Oh, my sweet, black-eyed mamma, how I have longed to see you," she said, in a sweet, caressing whisper.

"I have always been at home to you, Ellen," was the somewhat cold reply.

"But I have been so busy. Claude, I say, angry yet? What is it all about?"

She held out her hand again, glancing at him a little anxiously from under her long lashes. No ordinary man could have withstood that look, the creature was so lovely in her rich health and graceful position.

"Don't be cross, Claude. Only think, I haven't seen you in three whole days. How can you treat me so cavalierly?" she pleaded, a little frightened by his persistent coldness.

"Still, I passed you in the street but little more than an hour ago," was his grave answer.

The color fluttered unsteadily over her face.

"Indeed? I did not see you."

"I presume not. You were occupied."

"Was I? Oh, dear, yes—I remember. I happened to meet Mr. Houston. He was telling me of—"

She caught the force of those large black eyes bent upon her, and broke off, while a blush rose visibly from the crests of foamy hair on her neck, up to her forehead.

"Ellen, why will you associate with that bad man?"

Claude asked the question in a grave, steady voice, which would have warned a wiser person not to trifle with the subject. But Ellen possessed the coquetry and craft of a small character—no real wisdom.

"Bad man! Everybody that I know of calls him a gentleman, except you."

"You can not be a judge where a person like this is concerned. No refined woman could have the power to understand him."

"But other people receive him."

"I do not, and with good reason."

"Claude, you—yes, I see it—you are jealous."

The reckless girl clapped her hands like a child, and, burying her head on Mrs. La Clide's lap, broke into a forced laugh.

"No, Ellen, I am not jealous. No honorable man could be, here."

"Then do be good, and let this poor man alone."

"Ellen, listen to me."

"Well, I listen, but do get it over with. I hate scolding."

"This has become a serious question between us—a question which may end in a separation."

The girl flushed crimson, and sat upright, with angry gleams coming into her eyes.

"Well, sir, what is it you want of me?"

"I wish you to give up any acquaintance which exists between you and young Houston."

"Indeed!"

There was a sneer in her voice, but he did not notice it.

"I desire that you will never walk with or speak to him again."

"And turn hermit or nun—which would please you best?"

"Neither would please me. You know how well I like society, and I know how well you can adorn it. Let this be happily and worthily, and I ask no more. Look around these rooms. How often you have seen them filled with the best and highest of the land. I wish nothing different in my married life. But no disreputable man shall ever cross my threshold or speak to my wife; of that be assured."

"Indeed, you begin early to play the censor over me and my friends."

There was something in her voice now that hardened her lover.

"The woman I marry must be so far above suspicion that censorship can not reach her," he answered, almost sternly.

"Suspicion, sir—suspicion!"

"Do not mistake me. I charge you with nothing. On the contrary, I believe it is your very innocence that leads you into the appearance of evil."

"Evil! evil!"

She sprung to her feet, and confronted him, like a beautiful fury. All her craft, all her cunning forsook her in that storm of temper. In a single moment she was dashing the work of her life into fragments. All this was so different from the honeyed words she had just been listening to from the lips of that bad man, that her true nature broke forth, but not yet in words.

"Still you misunderstand me," said Claude, grieved and astonished, "and to avoid this I must speak more plainly. This Houston is not a proper associate for any woman, much less for the one who is to share my home. You are young; you are ignorant of the stories afloat about him, or you would

not thus persist in wrecking both my happiness and your own."

The girl had been growing pale with suppressed anger; every fiber in her frame quivered, but still she had a smile upon her lips.

"Pray, Claude, reserve these lectures till you have a right to force them on me."

"That time will never come, Ellen."

Claude spoke in sorrow, but firmly.

"Then I am to understand you break our engagement?"

She turned white to the lips; he, too, was pale and cold.

"Better that than see my name dishonored. Mother—mother, do not leave us!"

Mrs. La Clide seemed frightened. There was something strangely wild in her eyes. This scene was becoming too painful for her. She looked imploringly on her son.

"Yes, I must go; the air of this room is close. Do not be unkind, my son. Ellen, remember how we have loved you!"

The young girl turned upon her almost insolently. Her lips curved into a sneer, but she restrained her speech, and Mrs. La Clide left the room. Claude was softened by his mother's words. He followed her with loving glances from the room, then turned more gently to his betrothed.

"Ellen, dear Ellen, I do not wish to be unkind. You know well how I have loved you. Your wish has always been my law, but I can not surrender my self-respect."

"Nor can I."

"Ellen, I beg—beseech you to listen to me."

"I do listen, sir."

The rapid beat of her foot on the carpet, the firm clench of her hands, the compressed lip and suppressed breath, told in unmistakable language with what spirit she listened.

"Give up the society of that man, for my sake, for my noble mother's sake—she, so honorable, so sensitive to all the proprieties of life, it would kill her were a breath of shame to fall on one of our household."

"Well, sir, I will not forget your mother. She has been in my thoughts very often since this engagement."

"Well!"

"No, it is not well; of what more do you accuse me?"

"I accuse you of nothing—only plead with you. Give up this dangerous acquaintance."

"Suppose I do not choose to gratify your jealous demand?"

He stood in silence a moment, looking at her steadily, with a glance in those velvety eyes that would have touched any other woman to the soul.

"Then you and I must part."

"Then be it so!"

The rage in her heart broke forth, now she had lost all control of herself.

"Ellen, think again, for my mother's sake; she loves you already as a daughter. Look, she is coming back."

"For her sake. What is she to Ellen Worthington—the half-breed—the Indian?"

She had advanced to the door, and stood with one hand on the latch, revealed in all the bitterness of her true nature. She turned, and stood face to face with the woman she had insulted. The deathly white of that face struck her insouciance dumb. She shrunk away and crept from the house, baffled and in fierce anger with herself.

Mrs. La Clide stood near the threshold, waving to and fro, but without the power to move.

Claude sprung forward.

"Mother, dear mother!"

It was the wail of a strong heart in agony—the plaintive cry of a soul suddenly stricken in its love.

She fell across the threshold, before his outstretched arms could reach her. He lifted her up, and laid her head upon his bosom, calling out:

"Mother! mother! mother!"

She made no answer; her eyes were closed, a tinge of blue crept around her mouth. During all that scene, her heart had been laboring with fearful struggles. When the last insulting speech fell on her ear, piercing the hidden pain of her life, the poor heart gave one wild leap, and carrying death with it.

Days of dark delirium to the bereaved man followed. His body became a wreck and his mind a chaos. Wild shapes

fitted through his brain, and fever parched up the springs of life. With body and brain thus terribly wrung—thus strained to an unnatural tension, the wonder was that he survived the shock of that cruel loss. But life had many stern duties for him—lessons to be learned—battles to be fought—deeds of daring to be done.

Breathing, but unconscious—dead to all around him, he lingered for weeks on the parting ridge between time and eternity; then came days of rest, of sweet, unthinking repose. Mind and body both slept, and, refreshed, he awoke, weak, very weak, but sane. A month of careful nursing followed, and his mind became bright, though somewhat chastened in its fiery impetuosity—his figure resumed its erect poise and grace of motion—stern determination took the place of vacillating purpose. He was once more a man! But that house could no longer be his home. The serpent had left its trail over every thing there. He must seek a new life.

His course was soon adopted and his plans completed. He left his estate to the care of a tried friend. But even then, some lingering of the love he had sternly banished from his soul flashed up again for an instant, and he secured a competency to the woman, who, rock-like, had shipwrecked his last hopes. From the elk-horns on which it had so long rested, he took down the very rifle his grandfather had carried when he went on the Indian trail—took the wampum belts, and pouch, and tomahawk and knife—arrayed himself in the same well-worn hunting-dress—flung upon his horse the trappings of a *gens du lac*, and turned his back upon civilization, to seek in the wild prairie forgetfulness of self. The home he sought was in the wigwams of the Dacotahs.

CHAPTER V

THE PRISONER OF THE DACOTAHS.

ON a gently-sloping bank, which fell greenly to one of the many streams that empty into the north fork of the Platte, the Dacotahs had erected their encampment. On the rich sward, and in the shade of clustering trees, the wigwams had been hastily erected, and the business of savage life commenced its course. The fires of the morning were just beginning to send up white puffs and blue curls of smoke, that floated among the forest-branches in a thousand fanciful wreaths, at which the painted warriors gazed dreamily as they smoked in silent idleness around the encampment. Half-clad children tumbled on the grass or rolled in and out into the stream, rioting in the waves like water-dogs, and shouting out their animal joy, till the whole prairie rung with it.

Outside the camp, snarling curs fought over the already well-picked bones, or slunk off yelping, when punished for their constant thefts. In the back-ground, horses browsed luxuriantly on the tender foliage of the trees which surrounded the little prairie with a belt of arching greenness.

Through the openings of these trees, hunters could be seen in groups, returning from the woods laden with game. The wigwams were built in a large circle, apart from a lodge of superior dimensions that stood in the center, and yet, in a way, guarding it. This lodge was gaudily decorated, and the painted buffalo-skins which covered it were fastened closely to the ground.

Every thing about this lodge was silent as night; there was no noise from within, no sign that it was inhabited. Not a curve of smoke came from its cone-like top. Not a child played near it: so closely was it guarded, that a savage foot-step dared not venture within speaking distance of it. Yet how still the lodge was—you would have thought it a habitation of the dead.

The Black Eagle came from his night rendezvous and

entered the encampment, not with his usual savage pomp, but quite alone, and stealthily, as if he would gladly have escaped observation. It was not fear or modesty, but crafty cunning which rendered him so cautious. The gold which he had received weighed him down with anxiety. His treachery in holding the secret negotiation he well knew would, if once known, destroy his popularity with the tribe. Besides this, it would enforce a division of the spoils.

To place this gold in a safe hiding-place had been his first object; compared to this, the safety of his prisoner had sunk into a secondary consideration. More than once, in his rapid march toward the Dacotah camping-ground, he had resolved to bury his treasure in some rocky gorge, or hide it in the crevices of some unfrequented cañon, or sink it deep in some swift-running stream. But avarice, the master demon passion of his nature, forbade this. So long as possible, he yearned to detain the gold in his own personal keeping. Thus, he brought it with him to the tribe, and crept like a thief stealthily into the camp where he had a right to command.

He entered his own wigwam, and after cautiously assuring himself that no one was present to observe his action, thrust aside the brand from the center fire with his foot, and buried his treasure deep, deep in the ground underneath. He stamped it down close, scattered the ashes deftly over the spot, heaped the brands together again, then breathing deeply, as if a load had been lifted from his heart, gathered up his savage dignity, and stalked forth into the encampment.

The Black Eagle paused to speak with no one, but strode forward to that lone wigwam, and raising a corner of one of the skins, entered it.

An abrupt movement, and a wild sharp cry greeted him. Like a fawn, which some deep mouthed hound has tracked to its hiding-place, Esther sprung from a pile of furs, and retreating to the furthest bounds of the wigwam, stood regarding the savage, her eyes full of wild terror, her white lips trembling, and every pulse in her body quivering with horror and disgust.

Black Eagle looked upon her in grim triumph.

“The daughter of the pale-face has been smiled upon by the Manitou of dreams. The waves of sweet slumber have

been surging in her ears," he said, toning down his deep, guttural voice into something like gentleness.

"Why am I kept here? Tell me, why have I been so cruelly torn from my father?" she cried, passionately. "How could you have the heart to return our kindness in this way? Think of the Laramie. Did we not befriend you then better than any of your own people?"

"Pale-face, your words fall on the ear of Black Eagle sweet as the song for birds in spring-time; his heart drinks them in as the dry earth opens itself to the summer rain—speak on."

"You are cruel, unprincipled; you evade my question. Tell me, oh, I beg of you, tell me for what purpose I am here. Why have I been made a prisoner? If gold is your object, my father will give it you in handfuls for my safe return."

"The yellow dust of the pale-faced chief will yet be stored in the wigwams of the Dacotahs."

"What! Man, if you are a man, what terrible meaning is hid beneath your words?"

"The Dacotahs are masters of the prairie! When the mocasin of his enemies leave their print upon the trail, the warriors gather thick around like the buzzards. He has robbed the red-man of his lands and hunting-grounds—has driven the deer and buffalo away before the thunder of his fire weapon. They starve for food—he has plenty. They long for the swift-footed horses—he has them by hundreds. Their little ones cry for milk—his wigwams are filled with it."

"Then you would basely steal his daughter and afterward plunder him."

"Let the girl of the snowy skin listen. The words of the warrior are few. Not his the tongue to prattle like the little pappoose, or tell of his deeds like the squaw of an hundred winters. The Eagle of the Dacotahs saw the young dove of the valley. He swept from his mountain home on his broad wings and there was mourning and blackened faces in the parent nest."

"But why have you done this, if gold was not your object?"

"When a soft glance of the fiery-eyed sun steals into the wigwam of the pale-faces, does he shut it out? When the smile of morning cleaves its way through the shadows of night,

does he hang thick blankets in his way? The red-man is not a fool. He has eyes and he can see."

"Why speak in riddles? Tell me plainly of your meaning, if you would have me answer."

"The daughter of the chief of the long rifles came to the wigwams of the Black Eagle. He looked upon her and his heart grew sick of the brown faces of his tribe. When he returns from the long trail, with aching feet and tired limbs, the white-faced maiden shall make his wigwam bright."

"Still I can not comprehend. Your words are a mystery and your actions shrouded," answered Esther, turning deathly pale.

"Black Eagle would have a pale-face squaw to dress his venison and fringe his leggins with the scalp-locks."

"What! Your wife? Merciful heavens, you can not mean that!"

"The tongue of the pale girl is sweet; her hair is like the silk of the maize, when browned in the moon of the falling leaf. She has turned the trail of truth. She shall find a home in the wigwam of the red-man. The Black Eagle has said it."

"Never! I will die first."

"The angel with wings like the thunder-cloud that stands by the dark river comes not when the children of earth call. Many years yet the moccasin of the wife of Black Eagle will press the prairie."

"Your wife—the White Hawk—yes."

"Waupee will wait upon the new wife of Black Eagle. She is put away from the breast of the warrior."

"Any thing but your wife." The poor girl shuddered as she spoke the hateful word. "Merciful heaven, am I reserved a fate like this?"

"The dove may beat its tender breast against its prison, but the coo of its song will yet be music for the ears of its mate when it looks for his coming with its wings folded."

"I your mate! I dwell in your wigwam! Listen to me, treacherous man. Sooner than submit to that, I would leap from the precipice and dash myself into atoms on the jagged rocks beneath—leap into the deep stream and float a disfigured corpse among the reeds on its shore—with my own hand I

will destroy the life God has given me, and escape with self-murder from your loathsome power."

Without deigning to reply to what he perhaps scarcely understood, the savage whistled long and shrill. In a moment the poor, injured and abandoned wife, Waupee, entered, shrinking and trembling as if in mortal terror. A few words of command were given to her in her nation's tongue that the white girl could not understand, and without lifting her eyes, Waupee departed.

"Let the child of the white man prepare!" continued Black Eagle. "The Medicine of the tribe is hastening to prepare the marriage ceremony of the Dacotahs. The maidens are weaving the bright flowers of spring, and the warriors decking themselves in their best robes. The hour has come. The wigwam of the sachem shall lift its mat for a new bride.

"Man! man! is there no mercy in your heart, no feeling, no pity?"

A whistle—a signal, apparently—fell upon the ear of the Indian. He seemed greatly disturbed, and without reply, hurried from the wigwam. As he lifted the covering on one side in passing, the form of the White Hawk entered at the other.

"Waupee, White Hawk!" exclaimed Esther, clinging to her. "Save me from this awful fate. Think of my father—think of my friends—of those that love me, those that I love. For the sake of heaven, if I was ever kind to you, save me now."

The finger of the poor, discarded wife was pressed upon her lips, and bending low she kissed the hem of Esther's dress but did not speak a word. But her movements were rapid as thought. From the folds of her garments she drew forth a long and slender knife, placed it in the hands of the prisoner, and almost before her purpose could be divined, glided from the wigwam.

"Thanks, at least, for this," muttered the prisoner under her breath. "When all else fails, I will use your knife, poor Waupee."

A step approached, and concealing the knife, she stood, white and statue-like, awaiting the next phase of her destiny. It was only a girl of the Dacotahs who brought food. In her desperation, Esther strove to question her; but the girl

stood motionless while she spoke, with her eyes bent on the ground, but gave no word of reply.

She placed the rude meal, upon still ruder dishes of birch bark, on a mat in the center of the wigwam, and went out, having performed her task in profound silence. Filled with terrible apprehensions, Esther did not touch the food, but, drawing the knife from her bosom, stood at bay, ready to use it in self-defense, or, failing that, in self-sacrifice.

"Why should I not use it now—before he comes?" she murmured. "It is but a blow, and I am safe. But oh, the dark labyrinth of that unknown valley; my very soul shudders at the thought of threading it unbidden. Better endure the black horrors of my situation a little longer, trusting in a merciful God, than escape by crime." A touch upon the arm brought her with a wild leap from the ground where she had been sitting. It was Waupee, the wife of Black Eagle.

"The daughter of the pale-face can cease weeping. Black Eagle is listening for the hoofs of his enemies. He sees a great cloud of dust on the prairie, and he has many foes. Eat in peace; he will take the trail and ride toward the setting sun."

Esther's strength gave way now. She fell upon her knees, and sobbed out her passionate gratitude, clinging to the poor Indian wife and lavishing kisses on her robe and her hands.

An hour later, and, seated upon a but half-tamed steed, with a painted warrior at either side, she was hurried forward toward the rocky cañon known as the South Pass.

CHAPTER VI.

WATER!

WITH the long mane of his swift and sure-footed steed streaming in the wind, his tall form seeming a part of the horse he bestrode, Waltermyer led the way, followed by the anxious father and his men. There was no drawing of rein or slacking of speed—no breathing of horses or resting of men. It was to be with them a race for life, and every minute was dear and important as weeks of common time. But what course should they take? This was now the question, and Miles Morse, as he spurred his horse forward in the almost vain task of equaling the pace of Waltermyer, felt that all was uncertainty. But not so the border man. Blind trails were to him pleasant explorations. He was ever on the watch, his wits sharpened by constant exercise and constant danger. The wild excitement of a chase like that was far more to his liking than the winding horn and the baying of hounds ever was to hunter. Not a single thought had he of failure. True he might be too late to save the girl from the clutches of her enemies, but not too late to make them pay the penalty of their dastard deed.

"Stranger," he said, suddenly reining in his horse upon the summit of a knoll that enabled him to overlook the country for miles, "Stranger, did you say the gal was pooty?"

"More than that—most people call her beautiful."

"And the Mormon—Thomas—has seen her?"

"Yes; I remember that was his name."

"To be sure it was. Kirk Waltermyer ain't a fool, by a long shot. When he sees a doe wandering alone on the prairie, he knows from what thicket the cayotes will start in pursuit."

"But we waste time."

"Better take breath now than have our horses without wind when the time comes for them to go. And she was a pooty gal, was she?"

The question was not unnatural to a man like Waltermyer,

whose life had been spent in those trackless prairies and in the rocky cañons of the mountains. Since his childhood he had scarcely even seen a beautiful woman, or met with the refinement which no man appreciates more keenly than the border scout.

No one was more familiar with the squaws and dancing-girls of Toas, or the pale wrecks of civilization sometimes found in the squatters' cabins on the Columbia; but feminine refinement had been to him a vague memory that soon became his dream. His idea of a beautiful and educated woman would have matched the inspiration with which more perfect imaginations regard the angels of heaven. He could not think of a woman so endowed without a bowing down of his iron will, in imagination, at her feet. He was bashful and timid as a little child when these fancies crossed his path. He would have considered Sampson a happy and honored man in being permitted to lay down his strength at the feet of a beautiful woman. The border man looked upon women of this class as flowers that a rude hand like his would crush even in kindness—formed of far different and more celestial material than that which composed his strong arm and symmetrical limbs.

It is a truth that your daring Western frontiersman makes a refined woman his idol—a creature to work for, fight for, and die for, if need be, without a murmur. A smile from the beloved lips is ample payment for days and nights of toil, and a word of praise is reward enough for any danger that life can bring to him. Living, as he does, amid all that is poetic and sublime in nature, his associations render him peculiarly alive to the visions that take force and form from the solitude of thought to which he is often left, weeks and months together.

Thus the man who would not shrink from a hand to front encounter with the giant bear of the rocky sierras is ready to worship the being who has realized his fancy—to guard, defend and reverence her as less powerful natures never could.

"Pooty, is she?" repeated Waltermyer, after a pause. "Waal, she's no bird, then, to find a cage among the animiles at Salt Lake. I'd have give fifty slugs or an hundred head to have been upon the trail sooner. 'Tain't every horse can

keep up with mine, stranger; but if it was, we'd be rattlin' onto the rocks of Devil's Gate before the sun rose again. No, no; 'tain't of no use. I don't know of but one kedripid this side of the big river that can keep the lope with him for a hull day. A master horse this, stranger. More'n once he has saved my life, when the red devils were buzzin' thick as bees onto my trail and sharpenin' their knives to take my har. But Kirk Waltermyer had but to speak, and they thought a streak of black lightnin' was rolling over the perarer. I've owned many a horse in my life, but this one is—"

"See; there is dust rising yonder," interrupted the impatient father.

"Yes, I see!" and he sprung erect upon his steed to get a better view.

"What is it? Are the Indians coming?"

"As sure as you are here. But they ain't coming this way. Is your guard strong enough to keep your train?"

"Against an ordinary force. But why do you ask?"

"Because if they hain't there will not be a single hoof left. The red devils know you'll try to find the gal, and so they think they'll kinder pitch into the ring and help themselves."

"What is to be done?"

"DONE!" almost thundered the frontiersman in reply, as he again resumed his place in the saddle. "Done? You can go back and take care of the train if you like, but Kirk Waltermyer never leaves the trail of that gal."

"Neither shall I."

"Let the men go back! If your hand is only firm, and your eye true, it is all I ask; if not, you turn back too, and I'll take the risk alone."

"That would not be safe."

"Safe! I have never seen an hour of safety since I cut loose from the settlements and took to a roving life. Stranger, I am a rude man, but I know, though I never had much book learnin', that I carry my life in my hand. But there is a Power above that minds the poor, lone wanderer as well as the dweller in cities."

"Yes; God never is forgetful of his children."

"But, stranger, we must not stand to talk here. Yender

goes a thievin', throat-cuttin' gang of red-skins. They mean to have your stock; but if your boys are only steady and fight half as well as La Moine, they will go back howlin' without ary a hoof."

"Let us proceed, then. Cattle, property of any kind, is not to be thrown into the scale against my daughter."

"All the herds on the perarer are not worth a single curl of her har. Do you see that timber yender?"

"Yes; but it appears far distant."

"Forty miles in a bee-line; but if we don't get thar before the moon rises, we might as well turn our horses loose and give the gal up."

"Let us push on, then. The day is a long one—our horses are not fresh, and the day is drawing nigh to noon."

"Thar you're right. The sun comes straight down without castin' a shadder. If your horses had been only perarer-born now, and could travel all day without water, then—"

"Travel all day without water!"

"*Thar is not one drop between us and that timber!*"

"Few then will reach it; but—hark!"

"The boys are at it! I'd give a sack full of slugs to be thar! Aha! how the rifles speak! There goes a red devil at every flash if they'd only Western hands hold of the stocks. By the eternal! but they've stampeded the cattle! No; it's the prowlin' reptiles runnin' away like a pack of whipped cayotes. Yes, there they go scamperin' over the perarer. Your train is safe, stranger, though thar may be more'n one hand less to tend it; but heaven have mercy on the next that comes along weak-handed. It'll take many a hoof and many a scalp to pay for this day's work; and if they have seen La Moine, it will be dangerous travelin' for Kirk Waltermyer after this."

"You—why?"

"Only that I will have to father the hull of the business, for they know the Frenchman and I always hunt in couples. But no matter; the bullet ain't run yet that will put a stop to my breath. Now, stranger, since your yaller-boys and stock is safe, we must put the long miles behind us if we'd save the gal."

With the words still ringing upon the air, he dashed

forward on his errand of mercy—perchance of doom! Forward as a protecting Providence, and it might be as an avenging Fate! Forward, as a lover seeking his mistress, and yet the trail might end in blood!

The checked and restrained pace of the city steed was but as a snail's progress to the whirlwind of their speed. Proudly their crests were tossed aloft and their heads stretched out as they flung their sinewy limbs in the long gallop that appeared to laugh at space and scorn time. Joyous was the music of ringing snaffle and spur, sweet the lyric of their clattering feet to a horseman's ear, and wild, almost, as if "desert-born" their career, as they dashed on, snorting the hot breath from their scarlet nostrils and flinging the foam from the champing mouth. It was a race such as pelted thorough-breds may never know of, and the pampered, stall-fed beast would fail in, before a half-score miles were accomplished. Deeply the gopher and the prairie-dog had mined the earth beneath—the wolf's hole was yawning under their feet, and the long grass, trailed and curled, tangling around them; but determination had grasped the rein and a heart of fire led the van.

"Halt!"

The quick and ever-watchful eye of Waltermyer saw that the horses of his followers were unequal to the task, and, checking his own, he allowed them to move more slowly up a slight rise—a green billow as it were, in that emerald sea, crested with flowers, and looking more like the rolling swell of mid-ocean, when the night-tempest has passed and the morning sun has touched the topmost wave with light and fretted it with fleecy gold.

"We can never stand this pace—it will be death to the horses, if not the men," exclaimed Miles Morse, as he gazed at the heaving flanks and sobbing nostrils—the sinking fire of the eye and the trembling limbs. "The horses can not endure it, and unless we proceed more slowly we shall soon be compelled to go on foot."

"It's a pity, stranger, to be mean to dumb beasts. I always go agin it; but when there is life, human life, and that, too, a woman's, dependin' on't, it ain't no use to talk about horseflesh. It's twenty good miles to the timber yet, and if we don't manage to reach it, every hoof will die of thirst."

"And yet our only chance of life is in riding more slowly."

"And her's in bein' swift and persevering as the black wolf of the mountains, that can outrun the buffalo and tire the antelope."

But one thought had possession of Waltermyer. His vivid though unrefined fancy had exalted Esther Morse into a paragon, and, like Juliet, he wished but to annihilate space and time, until he rescued her from danger. In action—fierce, rapid and daring action, such souls alone find rest; and once enlisted, nothing can swerve them from what becomes, in their generous imagination, a sacred duty.

"Waal, waal," he continued, after a pause, "let the beasts jog on for a while. You can't expect horses that never saw a perarer before to keep the speed. But if I had only a know'd a month ago that we should'er had such a race to run, I'd'er had horses from a corral I know of, that would not have broke a gallop till they run their noses into them trees. It's only fun for my horse, but it's death to your'n."

Slowly, for an hour, they proceeded, with the hardy pioneer chafing every moment at the delay, and his equally hardy steed pressing against the bit, as if wondering at this unusual restraint.

"Waal, waal," he said, addressing his horse from time to time, as if he had been his sole companion, "Waal, waal, Blazin' Star, (he named him so, from the single white mark he had about him—the snowy spot in his forehead,) I didn't think we'd be joggin' across the perarer to-day as if we was goin' to a funeral. Any horse that is not good for an all day's run isn't of any account here, and the sooner the buzzards foreclose the mortgage they have on them, the better."

Insensibly, unknown to himself, he had slackened the rein, and his impatient horse had stretched his lithe limbs again into a gallop. With the careless fling that tireless power ever gives, and the certainty of foot that only comes with constant practice, he sped along, making light of the task, and leaving the rest far behind. Keen-eyed, and with heart of fire and limbs that mocked at exertion, he would have sped on, on, until the shafts of death struck him in his

reckless career, had not the iron curb again forced his will to bend to the strong hand.

And a sad scene for one so tender of heart awaited his eyes. The truly brave are ever merciful, and as the gallant soldier is both just and kind to his conquered enemy, so is the master to the dumb beast that becomes at once friend and companion on the lengthy trail. The pain of his steed becomes his own, and, tenderly and kindly as a mother, he watches, and strains every nerve to alleviate his sufferings.

The horses came struggling through the rank herbage up the long swell, reeling, staggering, and struggling to hold their own in the desperate toil. On they came, flecked with foam, their great eyes dim with exhaustion, their flanks heaving, their inflamed nostrils widely distended as the hot, dry breath panted through them.

Poor wretches, it was a pain to look upon them, so patient and so ready to drop down dead in that horrible journey. Their poor lips were drawn back, for the relaxed muscles no longer held them firmly in place, and the dry tongue fell helplessly through the yellow teeth, now visible to the roots. As the poor, dumb creatures turned their glaring eyes on their masters, but one wild pitying cry went up from the human lips:

“Water! water!”

That speechless agony of insupportable thirst—the horrible tragedy of mindless creatures perishing in dumb submission, made those stern men forget their own anguish. That picture of men and beasts grouped together in one horrible suffering was awful to behold.

“Waltermyer,” whispered the despairing father, in a voice that came hoarse and faint from the parched lips and seared throat, “can we not find water?”

“Have you no flask, man?”

“It is emptied long ago.”

“Take mine, then.”

“Good! But the horses? Can we not dig a well here?”

“Dig! Why, man, you would go to China before you found enough to wet the tongue of a bird. Do these sage bushes look as if they had ever seen dew?”

“Then the horses must die.”

“Not yet. Strip them of your heavy saddles—throw the blankets away. The cool air will revive them, and so we gain miles. Then, if worst comes to worst, they must be left, and my word for it, they will find water themselves long before morning. A beast’s instincts never fail in that matter. I’ve seen it tried over and again. Off with your saddles, boys, and drive the horses before you.”

He was obeyed, and again the company started, and straggled on. But the toil soon told on the men. They mounted once more, and forced the beasts forward, staggering, stumbling, falling.

“Water!”

The cry came now most piercing from parched human lips, for the sun, blazing above their heads, poured down sheeted fire upon them, and the now almost herbless earth was like an oven beneath their feet. Dense as the smoke from the smouldering ruins of a burning city, the dust rose, but to settle again, choking and blinding them. The breeze of morning was dead, and millions of myriads of insects swept a dense cloud along their path. It was agony to struggle on—death to remain!

“Water!”

With cracking lips and bloodshot eyes, they staggered on. The horses were fast becoming mad with thirst, and covered with blood from the pitiless stings of hungry insects—with the fiery sky and baked earth beneath, they still stumbled forward, hopeless, fainting, gasping for life.

“Water!”

In the yet distant timber, the green leaves rustled and sung a dewy psalm—the liquid crystals dropped into mossy pools—flashed over the white pebbles—leaped from the lofty rock—danced in foamy eddies, and flung high the wreaths of misty spray. Cool and sparkling they slept in the deep pools, sung along the rapids, and showered the jutting rocks, until they looked like Tritons shaking their wet locks, and rising from an ocean’s bed. From the far-off springs, the ice-grottoes and eternal snows of their mountain home, they had come, laughing, leaping, dashing, to charm the mind with fairy pictures, and gratify the thirsty soul, until it reeled with the overflowing of perfect satiety. Ah! what a dream for

fevered lips—bodies aflame with heat, and hearts sinking with the long-endured sufferings of ungratified thirst. What a vivid mockery it was.

"Water! water!" whispered every tongue, and the hollow-eyed and gasping horses told of still deeper want.

"Water, for God's sake, Waltermyer, guide us to water," was now the continued cry.

"Be men! A short hour will bring us to it. See yender, where the ground looks dead, and dry, and parched. That is the long grass of a savanna; beyond it we can find water by digging. The *arroyas* may not be dried up, but if they are, thar is, or was an old well thar that never failed me yet."

"Come on, then!"

Oh! with what fearful hoarseness the sound came from the seared throats—a harsh, file-like, rasping sound, as if the breath was forced between the thickly-set saw-teeth, or could find an outlet only between ragged stones.

"That I will, boys. I'd even go before—for, see, my horse hasn't turned a hair yet—and bring you water, if I dared. Put a bullet in your mouths, and we'll drink toasts yet, around the Challybate spring."

A horse dropped now and then, but they could not pause for that. Mind was superior in the struggle to matter. A man fell but was lifted up, encouraged, and again toiled on. The savanna was reached—the tall, dry, flag-like grass rose above them on every side, and walled them in alike from air and sun, but, alas! so also it confined the dust, and robbed them of the scanty breathing they had before enjoyed. But on! on! wildly they crept.

"A mile more and we are safe. Courage, boys!" shouted Waltermyer, standing up, as was his wont when he wished to reconnoiter, upon the back of his steed.

The rods appeared to lengthen out into furlongs, and the furlongs into miles; but, cheering each other, they still continued, almost groping their way. Hark! The heads of the remaining horses were lifted at the strange sound—their ears were erected—their eyes flashed wildly, and with a loud neigh they dashed over those who stood in their path, and, as if fiend-driven, rushed to the stream, and almost buried themselves in the tide.

An hour later, swarthy forms were stretched upon the grassy banks, and gratified senses were satisfied with the dewy mists rising around, and the cool, mountain-fed waters that sparkled at their feet.

Waltermyer had redeemed his promise, and the tide flowed by as uncared-for as if it had not been to them Heaven's gift itself only a few hours before.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORMON'S RIDE.

MORNING came, and the tents of the Mormons were struck—the jaded teams harnessed and the march began. So long had they been upon the trail that there was no confusion. All had been reduced to system—each man knew his place, and few were the orders required. All, save their leader, were looking forward to the “promised land,”—the valley that was to flow with milk and honey—the city of refuge—the abode of the saints. Truly with these people ignorance was bliss. They were happy in this delusion—satisfied with anticipation. But the man that rode that day alone—the man whose serpent tongue had lured the ignorant to leave home and kindred by the most infamous falsehoods—who knew well that the living springs he had pictured would become as the Red Sea, and the golden fruits as bitter ashes to their lips, thought neither of city or valley—temple or font. His mind was wandering amid a rocky cañon, and he was planning a rescue that should give to him the prestige of a benefactor. Yet even he felt the truth of the words, “the wicked flee when no man pursueth.” Might not his steps have been followed, and the conversation with the Indian overheard? With the suspicion of guilt he narrowly examined the faces of those who had been on guard the previous night, and endeavored by wily questions to learn the very thing he dreaded most to know.

Slowly the patient cattle toiled over the dry prairie, for on leaving the well-watered camping-ground the scene around

them changed as if the angel of destruction had passed before them, leaving blight and desolation. The green grass had been replaced by withered sage—the mossy bank by sun-cracked earth, and the cool, dewy air by the breath of a furnace. But still they toiled on, for was not the golden dream-land beyond? On, on, over the fenceless prairie—up the long slopes—along the road beaten by thousands upon thousands of feet until hard as iron, they wandered, a lost people seeking for rest they would never know.

It was near noon, hot and sultry, and the fainting teams were unyoked. In the scanty shade of the wagons the men threw themselves down, while the poor women cooked, toiled and fretted over the fire. "Elder" Thomas relaxed his dignity and seated himself amid a group of the youngest and fairest, and strove to ingratiate himself with the still hopeful maidens. Apparently at his ease, and with a mind untroubled by care, he was in reality as if clad in the shirt of Nessus, for it was nearing the hour of his appointment with the Indian and his base heart was trembling over the result of his plan.

Some plausible excuse was necessary in order to free himself from his companions—not all, though, for cowardice would not allow him to face Black Eagle and his savage warriors alone. They knew that he possessed gold—for he had been forced to give up a portion of his hoarded store to gratify the avarice of the Indian, and well he knew that their cupidity was not easily satisfied, or their longing for plunder ever put to rest.

"The cañons are lurkin' places for the rascally Utes," he said, to one of the foremost of the train who came to learn his commands with regard to the march. "It would not do to lead the Lord's people into an ambush where they would be slaughtered like sheep in a pen."

"They have not dared to attack us thus far," was the response.

"I know they are afeard of us on the open ground," said the elder, "but when they hide in the rocks and shoot their poisoned arrows down from their secret dens, bravery is of little use."

"We should send scouts ahead, then."

"Yes, that's just what I'm going to do. I'll take about a dozen of the young men and see that the coast is clear."

"You?"

"Even I! Am I not a leader in Israel?"

"But think of your precious life!"

Verily he was thinking of it, and how precious it was, at least to himself; but in a far different sense than his follower supposed. There was a rare prize to be won, or he would never have ventured his precious person in the undertaking.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," he replied, having somewhere picked up the expression and deeming it particularly *apropos* to the present occasion—high-sounding, and likely to "tell" upon the hearers.

So it was settled; accompanied by half a score of picked men, he set out, after having designated the point where the train should rest for the night—a place having the indispensable accessories of feed and water. A short gallop brought the elder and his men within view of a rocky gorge of the hills, that appeared as if cleft by some wizard spell from topmost crest to base; or as if a giant thunder-bolt had been hurled from on high and torn its way through the living rocks; or a riving plowshare of huge proportions had left a mighty furrow, never to be planted by the hand of presumptuous man.

"Now, boys," the leader said, dropping his voice to the lowest octave within its range, "we'll soon be there. I've often traveled it before and will lead the way. Keep close together and mind you keep your eyes about you, though I don't think we shall have any trouble. Hark!"

The hoarse croaking and a great flapping of wings bespoke the passage of a buzzard in search of its loathsome prey—of some poor beast which had been left to feed these scavengers of the wilderness and their fierce copartners, the ravenous wolves. How he scorned them, as, ghoul-like, they passed, stretching their thin necks and casting dark shadows on the path. Yet, was not his own errand far less merciful? Were not these wolves his peers?

An eagle rose and soared on its strong wings higher and higher until it became a speck in the ether. A matchless

bird was that eagle; his nest was built on the topmost cliff of a cloud-piercing mountain—from the giant pine that stood on its crest he could look down on the whirling storms and listen to the thunder rolling and crashing below. His eye shrunk not, blinded, from the noon-day sun, like meaner birds, but looked on when its red disk seemed steeped in blood, nor closed when the forked lightning shot its flame-tipped shafts hurtling through the murky gloom. A matchless bird—freedom's grand type, the chosen bird of Jove, the tameless and fetterless. Ah! brave wanderer, mount ever where foot of man can never stray. Tracker of the pathless azure, where his thoughts alone may wander—dweller in the boundless fields of the upper air and monarch of a mighty realm—realization, almost, of the spirit's dreamings, shall not the day come when we too can roam at will, tracking the infinite, defiant of space, regardless of time, cosmopolites of the entire Universe?

Hark! A crash like a million of ringing anvils! Leaping, bounding, thundering down the scarred side of the mountain, rolls a huge rock, torn from its bed by some unknown power and sent crashing into the yawning gulf below. The slumbering echoes thunder back the sound, and nature quakes under the fearful rush of the avalanche.

The rocky bed of a dry stream was reached, and cautiously the men proceeded, with their horses almost feeling the way amid the loose stones. It was a moment of fear with them all, for the giant boulder must have been forced from its bed by some fearful human power. What it might portend none could tell, but caution in that locality became a necessity. Every eye was turned upward, expecting that this avalanche would be followed by others more imposing and more fatal. Every moment they expected to hear the thundering of another mass and see a mammoth rock come leaping from the lofty crest, whelming them in *debris* and death.

But they still proceeded in safety. Still the tired horses daintily picked their way and the riders watched the frowning cliffs. At length the leader turned, and led them through the thick underbrush by a winding path that each moment became more difficult of ascent. Even his power and iron will, so long paramount to every scruple, was fast yielding to the terrors of the place. They looked upon the march as one

of certain death, if a foe should be lurking above—the undertaking foolhardy in the extreme, and they but victims to a causeless whim. In silence the Mormon heard their complaints for a time, then commanded a halt.

“Remain here,” he said. “Perhaps you’re right, and I stand a better chance of finding out what is above if I go alone. You stay here, boys, and keep quiet; but if you hear a shot fired, leave your horses and come to my help.”

The men took him at his word, and he started on foot, having given up his rifle, and armed only with well-concealed pistols. His plans had been thwarted by the reluctance of his companions. But his path was not a long one. From a look-out rock he saw a dark train of savage warriors winding through the valley, scarcely a mile ahead. Dashing down the hillside, he again joined his companions.

“It’s Indians!” he shouted—“rascally Utes, and, by the beard of the Prophet, they are carrying off a white girl! Now, boys, be steady and brave, and we will not only punish them, but free their prisoner. Come on, men, but do not fire—it will only exasperate them. Ride them down, and make a show of your arms, but don’t shoot, I say; you might kill the girl.”

The dreams of many a dark hour were near their fulfillment, as he fondly thought. He had but to stretch out his hand to grasp success. Mounting again, he led the way back to the bed of the dry stream, and the men followed, urging their horses forward with all possible speed.

“There they are, riding like so many devils,” he whispered, to the nearest; then, recollecting his office as spiritual guide and instructor, continued: “that is, speaking after the manner of men. See! they turn the point—now are out of sight. By heaven—may I be forgiven for the word—they are aiming for the hills! Once there, and no white man can follow them.”

“But why should we follow?” asked the one nearest to him. “The girl does not belong to us, and we only risk our lives for one of the ungodly.”

“By precept and example, by persuasion, and, if need be, by the sword, we are instructed to pluck the lost like brands from the burning. Let him who fears return. I will go

forward, for is it not written on the golden plates found by the martyr, Joseph Smith, that he who falls in *the cause* shall gain a crown of priceless glory?"

An unearthly yell rung through the valley ahead of them, as if fiends kept holiday, and sent their howling song mocking the echoes—a very chaos of strangled joy. But words are feeble and language faint to describe the horrors of an Indian war-whoop when first it bursts upon unaccustomed ears. Earth has nothing horrible or thrilling that can be compared to its shrill, quivering notes. It is more like the laugh of demons rejoicing over a lost soul than aught that human lips could, by any possibility, compass. Echoing amid the fastnesses of a mountain-gorge—telling of the brawny and pitiless savage thirsting for blood and seeking for scalps—of the blackened torture-post and the lingering agony by fire, it becomes the very knell of all that is horrible and soul-affrighting.

"Indians! Indians!" whispered the men, with blanched lips, as they crowded together like threatened sheep, striving to gain courage from proximity.

"Yes," replied Elder Thomas, "it's the way with the reptiles. They always yell like so many panthers. But it ain't the bark we have to fear, boys, but the bite."

"Had we not better go back and get help?"

"If you knew the ways of the critters you wouldn't talk so. If they had intended any harm they wouldn't have let us know where they were. No, no. All we have to do is to go ahead. Hold your horses hard, boys, and let them feel the spur. It requires a steady hand and sure foot to—"

The rest of the sentence was lost in air, for the horse that had so long borne him safely, springing from the sharp rowel, missed his footing, and both man and steed fell heavily rolling over and over down the ragged hillside.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRAIRIE FIRE.

NOT long, although the scene around them was verdant and peculiarly enticing after their severe struggle for life, did Waltermyer allow his men to rest, for he knew well that the enemy he was following would make no pause, and their steeds, prairie-born and trained, wild and hardy as those they carried, would make light of what to them had been a sore trial. He knew, also, that night would put an almost effectual barrier to their progress. As soon, therefore, as he thought the horses sufficiently refreshed for travel, he gave the requisite order, and, seconded by the poor, anxious father, found but little difficulty in forcing obedience.

"Up, men!" he shouted. "Ef your horses hain't rested by this time, 'tain't no use tryin' to go on."

"Which way are we to proceed, Waltermyer? No more prairie-work, I trust."

"No; we've done with that kinder thing, but we shall have to cross the sloo again, before we can strike the trail. It ain't very wide. Then we'll skirt along it, until we strike the p'int thar whar the nose of the mounting runs inter the perarer."

"Can we not keep on this side?"

"Onpossible; thar isn't footin' for a crawlin' snake, and I reckon them things can go almost onyw'ares. Ef you've a mind to try it you can, but Kirk Waltermyer hasn't parted company with his senses yet, by a long shot."

"Of course we trust entirely to your guidance. Lead on and we will follow."

"Ef you only could foller as I could lead, we'd soon overhaul the red rascals. But it ain't no use in tryin' to make such brutes as yours keep up with a horse! Stranger, I told you before there wasn't but one on the perarer that could, and he is—"

"What sound is that?"

"Only some stuw rollin' down the mounting. I've often

done the thing myself, just to see it jump and Lear what an infernal noise it would make."

"May it not be Indians?"

"Indians? Now just you look a-here, stranger; if you consate that any red-skin ever cut up such a white man's caper as that, you don't know any more about them than I do about Scriptur', and that is mighty little. But this isn't followin' the trail and savin' the gal. Inter your saddles—no, thank fortune you haven't got any, and your beasts would never stand them ef you had. But mount, onyway, and mind you don't go stragglin' through the sloo, for though thar isn't any water thar now, there are quicksand beds, and ef you git inter one you'll go way down—down—down into China."

Jaded as they had been by their previous journey, the sparkling waters of the chalybeate spring, that foamed clear as crystal and æriform as champagne, and the soft, juicy grasses that margined them, had revived the horses, and again they sprung forward, as if endowed with new life. Restraining and petting his noble black, Waltermyer took the lead, and soon they were lost to all surrounding objects in the tall dry rushes that ever mark the course of what the Western borderers call "sloo." Fully two miles wide, the task of crossing was not only seriously uncomfortable, on account of the heat and the clouds of insects that arose before and around them, but the footing was insecure, mined with holes and tangled with treacherous roots.

They rode on in silence, save when, now and then, some serpent, gliding suddenly from under the feet of the horses, startled them, and they leaped madly aloft with a wild snort, their riders wondering at the movement, for their eyes had not fallen on the reptile, with its gorgeous skin and fire-like eyes, as it glided rustling along to seek some deeper hole in which to coil its shiny folds.

"Many a time," exclaimed Waltermyer, with an almost noiseless laugh, as one of the company was dismounted by the leaping of the animal he rode, "I'd been willin' to have been thrown higher nor Independence Rock, to have just caught sight of one of the critters."

"Of what? What was it? I didn't see any thing."

"No, nor know any thing until you found yourself flat. Why, man, it was a rattlesnake, that's all."

"A rattlesnake!"

"To be sure it was; and I suppose you didn't know either that the reptiles and perarer dogs and owls all lived in one hole—sorter family parties."

"Pshaw!"

"Waal, you may pshaw, for you don't know any better; but when you have hunted for them to eat as long as I have, you'll be up to the dodge."

"Eat snakes!"

"Yes, and mighty good eatin' they are, though I don't hanker after them when thar's any thing else round."

"I'd starve first."

"Wait till you try, boy. I tell you, a starvin' man ain't no way perticular about what he eats. It's a sorter first come first served game. Now a mule isn't the best kinder meat, but it's palytable then. Horse is juicy, ef he hasn't been worked to death, and rattlesnake is prime."

A hearty laugh followed the epicurean opinion of the hardy frontiersman, and the march was resumed, with many an eye turned to the ground to watch for the unwelcome vistsors that are a terror alike to man and beast, when Waltermyer continued:

"Just hold your horses, boys, for a minute. A little rest won't hurt them none, and mayhap they'll need all the vim they've got in them when it comes to the mountings. It's about four years ago since La Moine and I was crossin' this very sloo. It was a dreadful hot day—August—when the snakes are blind as bats and ten times as veneralous as in any other month. You knew that, didn't you? If one bites you then it's sartin death. Waal, as I was a-sayin', the Frenchman and I was a-ridin' along—it was before I got this horse—when, all of a sudden, I heard him give two of the orfullest yells that ever was. It wasn't any time to ask questions, so I kinder looked, and, as I hope for mercy, ef thar' wasn't two of the biggest kind of rattlers twisted around his horse, and bitin' away with all thar might at his throat. Somehow, I never could understand the right of it. The horse must have trod on their tails. Onyway, they didn't live long, and the poor horse died the orfullest to behold."

"I thought you could cure the bite," remarked Morse.

"Waal, yes, so we can, ef we are only whar the blue-ash grows or the snake-fern is to be found. But I can tell you, stranger, that ef a man's time has come 'tain't no manner of use to doctor him. It is only wastin' whisky and time. Remember that, boys, and—"

The same war-whoop that had so startled the companions of the Mormon fell upon their ears, but so faintly that few, even if they had ever heard one before, could determine what it was.

"Thar they go, way up in the mountings, the yellin' painters."

"What, the Indians that stole—"

The heart-broken father could not finish the sentence. His feelings rose beyond his control, and when they burst through the fetters manhood attempted to impose upon them, they ran riot and ended in tears.

"I don't think it is them, stranger, or else they have got inter a fight. They wouldn't be howlin', and yelpin', and tearin' round in that style, ef they was tryin' to escape. No, no; they are cunnin' brutes, and know how to keep their tongue between their teeth better than white folks. Anyhow, we shan't catch sight of them by stayin' here talkin' snake, and get afeard of seein' the crawlin' reptiles."

"Let us press forward, then, and lose no more time."

"Waal, we ain't a losin' time. Haven't you found out, stranger, that a day's restin' when on a journey sometimes was a day gained?"

"Certainly, and have never traveled on the Sabbath."

"Sunday or week day, the same thing is a fact; but them that know, say that rest is sweeter on that day. It may be, stranger, and I ain't book-learned enough to deny it, 'specially as I hain't known Sunday come more'n twice in the last ten years, and that was when I was among the *Bois Brulé* gals, way up on the Red river. Somehow, they keep count with beads and little crosses, and I used to go to church with them, and throw the worth of a beaver-skin onter the plate, so that they wouldn't refuse me when I wanted them to dance."

A smile flitted over the faces of his band at the peculiar reason given by the guide for his piety. Perchance many of

his more civilized neighbors could have offered no better one. Once more he dashed to the front and led the way. But very careful, indeed, were his movements, often standing erect upon his horse, and looking over the waving sea of parched foliage. Once, on again resuming his seat, he called the band to his side.

"What now?" questioned a man who was among the most restive of the group. "Why not dash ahead and get out of this confounded mud-hole? Whew! its enough to worry a man to death in here. No air, no nothing but dust, gnats and poisonous snakes."

"Are you ready to die?" said Waltermyer, solemnly, his usual gay demeanor changing, and his honest face wearing an expression of intense anxiety, if not pain.

"To die? What kind of a question is that? No man is ready to die."

"Yet death is around you. Hark! Do you hear that noise?"

"Yes, something is rushing through the dry reeds. One of the horses we left, perhaps."

"No horse ever traveled so fast as that. Even a deer could not keep the pace."

"What is it, then?"

"Stand up on your horse and look."

"I see a great cloud of thick dust—thick as if a hundred buffalo were crowding along."

"Thar may be buffalo, and thar may be deer, but, my life for it, they are not coming this way."

"Tell us, Waltermyer," interrupted Miles Morse, "what is it George Cary sees?"

"Smoke!"

"Smoke? I do not understand you."

"Smoke and fire. But you will soon learn for yourselves."

Every one sprung upright, and from the backs of their steeds could see dense volumes of smoke, through which flashed red tongues of living flame, and again the question was asked as to what it could be.

"The sloo is on fire!" he replied. "We are cut off—surrounded!"

"Great heavens, can this be true?"

"Just as true as the heaven you call upon!"

"Then we are lost!"

"Thousands have been before you, and not enough left of their bones to tell what the fire has been."

"Let us hurry on—run our horses, and gain the open ground."

"You might just as well try to reach the moon. I tell you the horse was never yet shod that could outrun perarar fire. Even my good black, that can go two lengths to your one, would never live in such a race."

"And must we perish thus? Die a horrible death without so much as a struggle for safety?"

"It is gaining rapidly on us! It is coming a perfect whirlwind of flame!" said the now agonized father. "Oh, God, that I should perish thus! Oh, my poor, poor lost daughter!"

"At least, let us make a trial to outrun it," said another. "Any thing is better than standing idle."

"Come!" shouted his companions. "Come, we'll dash through and reach the high ground. What are you thinking of, Waltermyer, standing here?"

"Thinkin'," blurted out the guide, "how little men like you know of the great perarars."

"If you are going to stay here and be burned, I am not."

"Hold!" and the strong hand of Waltermyer was laid on the bridle-rein, effectually checking the course of the steed, that now, like its mates, snuffing the smoke that was fast closing around, stood trembling, snorting and pressing against the restraining bit, with wildly tossed head and flashing eyes.

"What do you mean? Are you mad?"

"Not I, but you. You know Kirk Waltermyer by this time, and ef you don't you'll learn him soon enough. So hear what I say, and remember it, too. I know that the fire is comin'—will soon be here, but the first one that offers to stir will have a short journey, for I'll send a bullet straight through his skull."

"But to stand still, Waltermyer," said Miles Morse, "when there is at least a chance of escape."

"What do you take me for, stranger—a crazy man or a fool?"

“Neither, but—”

“Now you just keep cool and listen. Tie your horses heads together, every man of you, and mind you don't make knots that will slip, for all the men on the perarer couldn't keep them from stampedin', when the flames roar around them.”

The command was obeyed, for there, as everywhere, in the hour of danger, the master spirit controls and directs—the firm hand and heart, and unflinching eye, tell of the pilot, that shall, unquestioned, guide, though the course he travels is crowded with shoals, quicksands and breaker-foaming rocks.

“Now bring us yours,” they said, when all the rest had been securely fettered.

“Not it! He ain't none of your city-bred horses, and it ain't the first time that he has been surrounded by red fire and black smoke. He knows his business here, better than you do,” and, at a motion, and slight touch of the bridle-rein, the noble black lay down and stretched his sinewy limbs, as if enjoying a grateful rest. This accomplished to his satisfaction, for he was very proud of this perfect command over his steed—(and what true horseman is not?) he stripped himself of his hunting-shirt, and threw it over his head, in such a fashion that it perfectly protected his lungs from smoke; then turning to his comrades, continued:

“Now, men, it is time you were to work. Just now you talked about being idle. Strip a circle clear of the grass—as large as ever you can, and mind you do it clean. At it, boys, hand and knife, tooth and nail! Ef you want to live, be active;” and he set the example, tearing up the rank grass with his immense strength, and piling it around the ring of horses.

Perchance, in his scorn at their want of knowledge, he had waited too long, for the mad flames were leaping upon them before they had time to make a cleared area of any considerable dimensions. In their very faces the fire came roaring on, darting through the black smoke, which rolled in clouds, threatening them every moment with destruction. Waltermyer saw that something must be done to turn it aside, or there was but little chance for escape.

“Fight it! fight it! and die for the ground!” he exclaimed,

snatching the hunting-shirt from off his head, and beating out the fire where it came nearest. "Whip it—whip it—thrust it—out with it," he shouted, as he rushed recklessly into the danger, burning his hands, with his hair and whiskers curling and scorching, as he gave the command.

"Thar, that will do," he continued, seeing that the danger had passed, and the fire had swept by, leaving a black, smoky belt of earth behind. "And now, boys, as you never saw a perarer fire before, look! It ain't every day you'll see such a sight, I can tell you."

Though his words were rude, they were simply true! Words are powerless to describe a broad prairie conflagration, and the brush of the most gifted artist would fail to paint a tittle of its dazzling beauty.

See, where it begins, when either purpose or chance has dropped a tiny spark into the dry herbage. A little curl of smoke, a tiny flame struggles for a moment for life. The slightest breath of air falls upon it—a gleam, scarcely larger than a fire-fly among the tangled leaves, and in an instant a lurid flame leaps forth—is kindled into a furnace-like glare, and directly a wandering hill of flame is sweeping resistlessly over the prairie. The harvest was ready for the flame-sickle—the sapless and withered stalks were waiting the reaping. Spreading like a circle in the tideless lake, the fire knows no bounds, save when exhausted for want of fuel, it turns back on itself and dies.

See, with bounds swift and longer than an antelope ever compassed, it o'ertops the tallest leaves—runs stealthily along like a golden serpent, darting spitefully its forked tongue of living flame on every side, while crackling, hissing, roaring, its terrible writhings uncoil. In waves of living fire, flashing from a background of dense inky smoke, it rushes on, regardless of barriers, and scornful of bounds, a winged maelstrom of devastation.

CHAPTER IX.

TRUE HEART.

THE band of Indians having Esther Morse in charge, led by the treacherous Black Eagle, belonged to that portion of the Dacotahs or Sioux, usually known among border men as *gens du large*, to distinguish them from the *gens du lac*, who lived in villages on the borders of Spirit Lake, and kept themselves aloof, in a very great degree, from both plunder and murder. Scarcely divining the object of their leader in conducting them through the rocky mountain passes, while another portion had been sent off to attack the train of the white men, and totally ignorant of his plans, they yet followed blindly on, believing that the end would compensate them for their toil.

It was upon the very crest of a rocky spur of the mountain that he had raised the war-cry of the tribe, intending only that it should lure the Mormon still deeper into the fastnesses, and so place him completely at his mercy, either for the disgorgement of hoarded gold, or it might be for total robbery. Very much to his surprise, a single clear, ringing voice, powerful as a trumpet, answered from a still higher point, and a single horseman was seen picking his way down the steep mountain side, holding every movement clearly within the range of his vision.

It was not wonderful that an object like this, appearing suddenly in that lonesome place, should startle the superstitious men who composed Black Eagle's band. For an instant they huddled close together, watching the horseman with a wild look of terror, thinking him the Manitou of the mountain, or some messenger sent from the Walham Tanka, or Great Spirit that dwells on high, who smiles in the sunshine, or frowns in the thunder-cloud, whispers in the morning wind, or rolls his anger over the earth in the rushing tornado.

Esther Morse watched the horseman with suspended breath, as he rode along the verge of the beetling cliff. To her vivid imagination, he seemed more like a warrior of the

air, descending from the fleecy clouds, than a mortal being. Then, as he descended toward them, and became more distinctly visible, her fancy returned to earth, and she could but regard him as a knight of romance coming to her rescue, with eagle plumes, tinged with sunlight, his shield shaped with golden bars.

It was strange, but even in that moment, Esther forgot her peril, her bonds, and her captivity. Strange, and yet is not our being twin-mated? Are we not composed of widely different natures—different as bright day from ebon night, yet, like them, bound in indissoluble fetters? One the soaring spirit—the mystical essence of immortality, and the other, the dull and sluggish clay that shall never know aught of eternal life; the ethereal essence of endless being, and the lifeless clod of the valley; the foreshadowing of things to come, and the inanimate pitcher that shall yet be broken at the well; the subtle lightning of Divinity, and the gross longings of dust. Ah! well, indeed it is, that:

“The soul itself dissolving from clay fetters, heavy, dreary,
 With spirit wings can travel the land of dread and doubt;
 Can revel in the brightness, when fainting and earth-weary,
 And for itself the secret of the mystery find out.”

A short descent, and the turning of a sudden curve brought horse and rider to the plateau upon which the band of Black Eagle were resting. With the silent greeting, usual among the red-men, he was received, and yet, more than one lip murmured audibly—Osse 'o.

Esther Morse watched his movements with keen interest. There was something kingly in his presence, and commanding in his movements, that convinced her he was a man of authority among the Indians. His dress partook more of a white hunter's, than that of a Dacotah chief. The saddle and decorations of his horse bore evidence of having been manufactured by the hands of an artist. His dress and moccasins were of finely-dressed doeskin; a cap of soft fur sat easily on his head, surmounted by a single eagle's plume; around his neck, hanging upon his bosom, as the Indians usually wear some favorite ornament, was a small shield, exquisitely engraved, and studded with silver knobs. Silver-mounted pistols were secured by a crimson sash, that girded

his waist, and in his hand he poised a spear of finer workmanship than ever came from savage hands.

Surely this man was either an exquisite in his tribe or a man of wonderful authority—no warrior ever displayed a form more lithe and sinewy. His eyes were large, bright, and of a color rare among the Indians. In the graded avenue or the broad prairie it would have been difficult to match him in that haughty grace which gives command and insures respect. There was a softness, too, in his deep, rich voice which seemed inconsistent with his wild life, and once, when he turned to look upon Esther, an encouraging smile stole over his lips, a thing so unusual with his people that the young girl felt her heart beating quick with wild hopes.

“The warriors of the Dacotahs are wandering far from their wigwams,” he said, addressing Black Eagle, and looking with piercing eye around the circle of his followers as if he read the motive of their journey.

“The moccasins of Osse ’o are not often heard so far from the Spirit Lake,” was the evasive response.

“The prairie is open to every one. The *gens du large* may roam unquestioned to worship the Manitou in the giant caves of the mountain.”

“My brother is a *gens du lac*. Has he been seeking the Great Spirit?”

“When the war-cry of the Dacotahs rung upon his ears he thought himself alone with the spirits of the mountain. But why are the horses of the Black Eagle turned toward the setting sun? The trail they are following leads away from their squaws and little ones.”

“The white man has many hoofs. His pouch is filled with the red gold. The Dacotahs are poor. The buffalo and deer have been driven from his hunting-grounds—the beaver and otter from the stream. The wild horse has fled before the fire-weapon of the pale-face—the green maize is cut down beneath the roll of his iron-shod wheels. The children of the prairie seek food for their little ones in vain. The wigwam is empty. The pale-face robbed the Dacotah and they but take their own back again.”

“The words of Black Eagle are like the trail of the serpent, crooked and full of guile. His tongue is forked and his feet

have lost the trail of truth. There is neither hoof nor food of the pale man in his keeping."

"They were beaten off—the pale-faces were thick as the berries of the mahnomonee."

"The kernels of the wild rice are countless. The Dacotah is not a mole that runs blindly into a trap. The fire-weapons of the pale-face are death. Where are the wounded and the dead among the red-men?"

Quailing as Black Eagle did in heart before this straightforward questioning, and well aware that the stranger knew the truth of the matter, he yet prevaricated:

"The red-men fled. When they saw that the pale-face would sweep them from the earth, they—"

"Stole this innocent girl and fled like cowardly wolves."

Bitter indeed was the taunt contained in the words, and the iron frame of the Black Eagle shook with the fury of his rage—a rage that he dared not exhibit while the cool, unflinching eye of Osse'oo was upon him—though he would not for a moment hesitate to seek revenge when he could do so in safety to himself. When in the hour of darkness he could strike assassin-like, or from some lurking-place send the stone-tipped arrow on its deadly mission, Black Eagle never hesitated; but now his coward eyes sunk under the gaze fixed upon him.

"What was your purpose in taking the girl?"

"Gold, gold."

"And you brought her here into the almost pathless mountains, expecting to find those here who would give you gold?"

It was another home thrust, and even those who had been the firm followers of Black Eagle began to see that he had some secret purpose in leading them thither. A quick suspicion that they had been imposed upon and detained for the selfish purpose of their chief, when they might have been plundering the train, or following in the trail of the Mormons, picking off their cattle as opportunity offered, or by some *coup de main* stampeded their horses, disturbed them greatly.

"No," replied Black Eagle, who had taken time to consider, for he dared not mention the Mormons as being in any way connected with his plan, "No; but the Dacotahs are not

fools! They leave not a plain and open trail. The paths through the mountains are known to them. They turn not from the high precipice or grow faint on the upward path. Their enemies can not follow. True Heart has not followed the hunting so little that he needs to be told of these things."

"Unbind the pale-face!"

It was the first words the poor prisoner could understand, the former conversation having been carried on in the Indian language. But now she felt that she had gained a protector, if not a friend, and with tears in her eyes she ventured to thank him.

"The tongue of the pale-face," he replied, "is twisted to the flattering language of her tribe. It has learned to belie her heart," and he turned hastily away as if in anger.

The idol which Esther had raised so suddenly in her imagination was shivered to atoms in a single moment; the man's voice, so changed and cold, struck a chill to her heart. Notwithstanding, she was very grateful for relief from her bonds, and springing to the ground, felt an exquisite relief in her freedom of limb. An Indian, at the command of her deliverer, went to a little spring that gushed through clustering ferns and tall grasses from a cleft in the rock behind them, and filling a birchen cup with water, brought it all cool and sparkling for her to drink. Another hastened to supply her with food, and Osse'o took a softly-dressed bear-skin from his saddle, and throwing it at her feet, motioned her to rest.

There was something in the thoughtful kindness of this action that filled her with gratitude again. She lifted her eyes to his face but did not venture to speak. She saw that the man was evidently concealing his real character. That he could not be an Indian was her first thought; but as she looked again, the idea was discarded, for both color and feature bore too strong proof of his descent to admit of doubt. But why should he be so kind? It was altogether foreign to the red-man's nature. Could he also think of making her his bride? Had she unawares attracted two savage lovers, who wished for a white slave in their wigwam? Again the old fear came upon her, and with throbbing heart she bent her head and gave way to a passionate burst of tears. But hope sprung to her heart again. She wiped the tears from her

eyes, and raising her head saw Osse'o standing with folded arms by her side.

"Let the maiden of the snowy skin dry her tears," he said; "they will wash all the roses from her cheeks. When the great and good Manitou placed the red-men on the prairies he did not give them all hearts of stone." Then, as if swayed by some sudden impulse he again turned sternly away.

"Will Osse'o rob the Black Eagle of his prize?" When Black Eagle asked this question True Heart stood directly before him upon the very brink of the precipice, so near that a touch would have sent him headlong to his death. He did not answer, but stood with his arms folded, looking out upon the prairie.

"Let the Dacotahs scatter themselves on the mountain and watch the coming of the pale-face," replied Osse'o, without deigning to answer the question, until it was repeated imperatively.

"My brother knows that Osse'o never stains his soul with blood—that he keeps his hand free from plunder."

"Why then come between me and my prisoner?"

"Is the Black Eagle afraid that a feeble girl will escape when surrounded by his warriors? Is he a coward that he binds her as he would a strong man at the stake?"

"No!"

"Does he think her tribe will pay him more gold when they know that he has tortured her without cause?"

"No! But he does what he likes with his own prisoners, and allows no man to interfere."

"The taunt of Black Eagle falls like the wind upon the ears of Osse'o. He hears it not."

Standing as the Eagle did a step in the rear of his companion, it required but the raising of a hand to gratify his malice—to revenge the insults he had received and free himself forever from molestation. This was far too good an opportunity to be lost—too important a moment to be neglected. The brawny arm was raised—was descending—at the instant Osse'o turned and saw the movement, though little dreaming of the purpose.

"What does my brother see that he points far away upon the prairie?"

"The buffalo and the deer are being driven by the Manitou of fire!"

"True; but far beyond the rolling smoke the train of the pale-face winds along, like a white serpent. The hoofs are many, for they leave behind them a long trail of dust."

"Like the buzzards, they cover the hunting-ground of the red-man; like the Manitou of starvation, they leave neither food nor grass behind."

"Like them, the Dacotahs can raise the golden grain—the rustling maize, and—"

"And be slaves! The Great Manitou gave to the children of the pale-face the grain for his squaws and little ones; but to the children of the prairie he gave the hunting-grounds. When the Dacotahs bow their neck to the yoke, like the cattle of the pale-face, then will their glory depart, the totem be torn from their breasts—their bows broken, their arrows headless, and their glory depart forever!"

"When the red-man no more reddens his hand in blood—when the torture at the stake is forgotten, and no scalp-locks fringe his leggins, there will—"

"Osse 'o is always talking peace. He is a coward, and dare not go in the war!"

Osse 'o turned from his companion, with a smile of scorn curving his lips. Once more folding his arms, he looked forth on the distant prairie, now a sea of surging smoke and flame.

Black Eagle crept close behind him; slowly his arm was uplifted. A thrilling cry broke from the white girl: it was too late! The blow fell with crushing force on the head of Osse 'o as it was slightly bent, gazing into the distance. The powerful form of the young chief tottered, his arms were flung wildly out, and he fell headlong over the precipice into the horrible abyss below.

Black Eagle gave a low, exultant cry; and springing upon the captive girl, lifted her to the white horse that Osse 'o had ridden down to the cliff. Regardless of her shrieks and struggles, he bound her firmly to the saddle; and calling to his warriors, prepared to descend the mountain. The savages looked astonished when they saw the young girl on Osse 'o's horse, and Black Eagle standing by her, alone.

The chief saw discontent in their eyes, and condescended to explain.

"Osse 'o has fallen over the cliff," he said; "his foot was not sure on the path. He was like an eagle with broken claws. Let him go."

There was no one to contradict this monstrous falsehood; for Esther had fainted on the saddle to which she was bound.

CHAPTER X

CANT—A STRUGGLE—A SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE.

THOUGH stunned by his fall, and covered with wounds, fortunately for him not of a serious character, the Mormon was lifted by his companions from the poor horse that had been killed by the fall—a noble brute sacrificed to save the life of a far less noble man—and laid upon a shelving rock. No remedies were at hand, save the gushing water that bubbled from the base, and the flask that he always carried with him; but the stimulus, liberally supplied, soon restored him. Not a single thought did this man give to his truly providential escape—not one word of thanks to the God whose hand had saved him from a sudden and horrible death—a literal crushing out of brain and heart—a total annihilation of body!

"Where's my horse?" was the first question that passed his lips.

"Dead."

"The brute! to fall, and nearly crush me, when I was so near—"

His tongue had almost betrayed him into the revelation of his secret; but he checked it in time, and continued:

"The prophet of the Lord was saved for the great work, and it is requisite that he be up and doing. Bretheren, in this day's work you can see one of the miracles written of on the ten golden plates—one such as only those on whom 'he mantle of the Prophet Joseph has fallen."

Were there ever blasphemous words like these uttered in

a situation so painful? Was there ever man who had just faced a violent death capable of such hypocrisy?

"Yea, of a verity," he continued, "we must be up and doing; for is it not written that we should let our lights shine? The horse has been given to the buzzards of the valley, but the spirit that is within man rises superior to the accidents of the moment. It is for him both to will and to do—to suffer and grow strong. Bretheren, give me a little more of the drink that is medicine in the hour of pain! Bretheren, the book revealed to the martyr Joseph teaches that the grossest sin of earth is disobedience, and shall never know the joys and privileges of the Latter Day Saints. Anathemas shall be heaped like coals of living fire upon the heads of the Gentiles who disbelieve! The keys of the kingdom were given to the rulers; they hold them in their hands, and woe be to him who disobeys! Into outer darkness shall they be cast who hearken and yet murmur!"

How much longer he would have indulged in this kind of sermonizing it would have been difficult to determine, had not one of the listeners, possessed of more courage and less blind belief than the others, interrupted him:

"Take my horse, Elder; he is sure-footed and strong. It is past noon, and unless the band moves on, we shall not only be caught in the darkness, but lose all chance of overtaking the Indians."

At any other time the Mormon would have been sorely displeased with the interruption and advice; but now he thought only of gaining the prize he had ventured so much for, and eagerly caught at the proposition.

"It shall be as you say; and when the hour comes that our journey is finished—when the lamb of the Gentiles that has been carried away by the wolves of the Sioux shall again be restored unto her people—when her soul is secure in the fold of the saints, then will I further instruct you in the tenets of the Prophet, whose spirit was translated from the earth."

"Mount, then, and—"

The sound as of some large body rushing through the air, tearing through the slender bushes, struggling for life on the side of the rocky cañon, fell upon their ears, and the foot of

the Mormon was stayed as he placed it in the stirrup. Different far from the fall of the huge stones was this strange noise; and for a moment they all stood doubtful and terrified. Urged on, however, by the Elder, they at length advanced. As they turned the point ahead, the body of an Indian, swinging directly over the ragged rocks, suspended by a slender root, and with fully a hundred feet between him and the bottom, met their appalled gaze.

"There is one of your red-skins," cried Elder Thomas, "punished for his crimes even while on the earth!"

"Shall we not try to save him?" asked one of his companions.

"It is not given unto the Lord's anointed to stoop to that which is unclean."

"But he is a man, and will be dashed to atoms."

"He is an Indian."

"But you will not let him hang in that awful way? See! the root to which he clings is parting! The earth is breaking away from around it; and then—great heavens! he is—"

"No, not gone! and yet it would be monstrous to leave him in such danger. I, even I, will save him, as did the Gentiles the Prophet Joseph!"—and snatching a rifle from one of his nearest followers, he raised it, and fired.

The report, and the swift whizzing of the bullet as it cut the air, awoke the countless echoes of the rocky cañon with grand reverberations; and the smoke, lifting like a fleecy veil, showed them that the Indian had disappeared. A stone, loosened from its scanty earth-bed, most probably by his fall, rolled down to their very feet; but what had become of the swarthy form that a moment before hung above the abyss, suspended, as if by a thread.

"The ravens will find him in the holes of the rocks," said Thomas, coolly returning the rifle to its owner, and without bestowing the slightest attention on the horror that ran through the group at this unnatural murder.

"And now, bretheren, not forgetting the glory of the Prophet, let us hasten onward and save the dove from the snares of the savage fowler."

Strange, indeed, would it have been if sadness and silence had not followed a brutal murder like this. As Thomas led

the way, the remainder followed, not only dumb with astonishment, but sorely grieved that one they had looked upon with such reverential love, should not only stain Christianity and manhood, but even common humanity with a crime so terrible—that the saint should disappear in the murderer, and the garments of regular succession from the immaculate Joseph should be steeped in crime. Ah! could the blinding scales but have fallen from the eyes of “the faithful” everywhere, how soon Salt Lake would be a city of ashes, and the “beautiful valley” again a wilderness. When the *true religion* is stripped of cant, hypocrisy, forms and idle ceremonies, how beautiful in its simplicity will the journey be that the soul must travel to reach the gardens of eternal sunshine, and purity, and love, beyond “the river.”

A small white flag, waving in advance, instantly fixed the attention of the party. It was a strange symbol in that lonely place, and much more so when held, as it was now, in the hands of a lone Indian. All except the Elder stopped in astonishment, doubtful how to act, but he recognized in the bearer his ally the Black Eagle, and instantly commanding a halt, proceeded on foot to ascertain the meaning of his appearance.

“Has my white brother,” began the Indian, as soon as the other was at his side, “seen the body of a Dacotah lying among the rocks?” Certain as he was that no one could have fallen like Osse ’o, without being dashed into a thousand atoms, yet he wished to assure himself of the fact by ocular proof. He even desired to pay the last rites of burial to the corpse, knowing well that it would be to his own benefit, and stand between him and suspicion with the tribe by whom the chieftain was more than loved.

“I saw an Indian hanging by a root from the precipice, and was going to help him, when all of a sudden he fell, and was crushed at the foot of the rocks.”

Black Eagle could not well doubt the story, for, base as he was, the Indian would have scorned to leave his worst enemy in a situation so terrible. The savage would have rescued him, even if an hour afterward he had sought his scalp, and therefore had no suspicion of the white man. If he had dreamed of what had passed, the lone rock upon which they

stood would have been the theater of a second crime, and the first murderer would have executed fearful vengeance upon the second.

"It was Osse 'o of the Dacotahs," he continued, after his careful scrutiny of the Mormon had ceased. "We were standing together upon the cliff. He was looking over the prairie—the rock was treacherous and broke from under him. He fell before the arm of his brother, Black Eagle, could save him."

"Well, it's to be regretted."

"He has gone to the happy hunting-grounds. The swift canoe has ferried him over the dark waters of the river of death, and his song is heard in the flowery prairies of the Great Manitou."

"May he rest in peace! And now, about the girl?"

"Has my pale brother been trying strength with the giant bear of the mountains?" was the evasive question, as the Indian glanced at the torn garments of the Mormon.

"No; my horse fell with me—that's all. But the girl?"

"The trail upon the steep hillside is not for the warriors of the pale-face. The Manitou gave them to his red children. Their foot is sure—their horses trained to the rugged path."

"Well, well, I've no time for words about it. Have you brought the girl as you promised?"

"Has the pale-face brought the yellow dust that his people have made a great Manitou? Has he remembered the gold?"

"Yes; let me but get the girl into my power, and it shall be yours."

"Will he let his red brother look upon the gold? It is bright as the sun, and he longs to see it shine."

"When I see the girl, then—"

"Look!" and the Indian led him forward a few steps and pointed into a little valley, apart from the main one, and closely screened by high rocks.

"Surely it is the Lily of the Valley," exclaimed the Mormon, clasping his hands. "Mounted upon a milk-white steed, she cometh to gladden the soul, as sweet waters doth the thirsty earth. She is fair as the Cedar of Lebanon, and the—"

"Gold!" interrupted Black Eagle.

With reluctance, the Mormon doled out half the required sum. It was hard to part with it, but harder still to give up the vision he had indulged in so long.

"Is the tongue of the pale-face crooked? Are his eyes dim that he can not see? Have his fingers forgotten how to count?" asked the Indian, somewhat savagely.

"No, no, it is all right. When—"

A shrill whistle rung through the valley, and Black Eagle cut the explanation short.

"My brothers call. The Black Eagle will lead his warriors out of the little valley into the broad road. Then let the pale-face come and get the young squaw for his wigwam."

"Come and get her?"

"Did he not so tell the red sachen?"

"True, I had forgotten. Mind your men don't fire. I have told my men not to shoot. Let there be a sort of a sham fight, and as soon as I have got the girl, you can come quietly to me, and I will pay you even more than I promised."

Without another audible word the Indian departed, but his thoughts were the embodiment of treachery. The white man had gold—should it not be his? The girl was fair—should she not fill his wigwam far away by the margin of Spirit Lake? The companions of the Mormon should only play with their weapons—should his be so careful? They were the enemies of his race—should not their scalps hang in the wigwams of the Dakotahs? Ah! it was a great temptation for a savage warrior, and little faith could be put in his promises when red gold, and rich plunder, and a snowy bride, were luring him to the accomplishment of the very things his nature panted after.

The Indian to the fragment of his tribe, and the white man to his companions, and again both parties proceeded, each leader giving a far different version of the meeting, and each one shaping it to suit his own ends. A scant mile, and they were brought into full view—neither rock, tree or hill obscured their vision.

"There they go, the cowardly thieves," shouted the Mormon, as he waved his little troop on.

"There come the false warriors of your tribe," whispered

the Black Eagle, in the ears of the shrinking, yet hopeful girl—shrinking from him and hopeful of rescue. "Yes, like wolves, they come, but let the maiden beware. The knife of the Black Eagle is keen-edged and his tomahawk heavy—his bow-string is strong, so is his arm. Let her not try to leave his side, or—"

The shouts of the Mormons urging on their steeds, and the desperate rush of the spur-driven brutes, admitted of no further threatening. The ranks of the Indians were formed to resist the attack, and their arrows flew thick as hail, but, purposely aimed too high, passed over the heads of the white men. So also was it with the bullets of their adversaries. It was soon front to front, and hand to hand, and seemed more like a bloodless tournament—a base and senseless imitation, gotten up as a foolish aping of the chivalry of olden times, than the meeting of two races that ever have and ever will be enemies. But this rough play could not long continue without arousing fierce passions—fierce hands clutching the ready weapons in earnest. One of the Mormons, more powerful and better mounted than the rest, succeeded in breaking the ranks of the Indians, and gaining the side of Black Eagle, who had remained in the rear to keep guard over the girl. It was Elder Thomas who should have been there—he was to have been the savior, and loud he commanded his impetuous follower to turn back. Possibly, he was unheard in the din of the, as yet, bloodless strife. At any rate, he was disregarded, for the brawny Mormon saw the girl and dashed to her side, perfectly regardless of all the opposition that attempted to stay his course.

"By heaven!" he shouted, "it's the very gal that we used to see, and that sung so sweet to us at Laramie. Down with the cursed red-skins, boys! Give them no quarter, the infernal brutes!" and his pistol-butt struck the Black Eagle full upon the skull, and leveled him to the earth in a moment.

Vain now were all attempts at control. A fierce blow had been struck; a chief of the Dacotahs hurled from his horse. In less than a minute, knife and pistol were doing their deadly work. Wildly pealed the fierce battle-cry of the savage; loudly and clearly it was answered by the challenge of the white man. The innocent trial of strength had been

changed, quick as thought, into the fearful tumult of the battle-field. Now, death's dark hounds must lap their fill of human blood!

But it was of short duration. The superior skill, strength and weapons of the white man could not long be withstood, and, with many wounded though none killed, the Indians withdrew, commanded still by the Black Eagle. The chief had been but stunned for a moment, and soon separated himself from the *mélée*. But it was to find himself standing face to face with Elder Thomas, both effectually cut off by the combatants from the girl. The narrow valley denied them footing on either side, and when, at length, they had succeeded in drawing off their followers, they looked in vain for milk-white horse or snowy prisoner! They had vanished, as if the earth had swallowed them.

In sullen silence the parties of the white and red man separated, but each with dark thoughts of revenge at heart. Ah, many a peaceful traveler has paid, with life, the price of that day's work. Many an unwary man has been shot from behind rocks and trees—has died with the poisoned arrow festering in his side; or, worse perchance still, been robbed of all, and left to lingering death by starvation. And many a red-man, too, has been shot down in very wantonness—has fled from his burning wigwam, and seen all he loved perish, literally butchered by bullet and flame, like sheep in the shambles. Yes, the Oregon trail is beaten down hard as iron with the hoofs and wheels of the thousands of emigrants, but so, also, is it lined upon the map with blood.

CHAPTER XI.

PARTING—A LONELY RIDE—A NIGHT STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS.

RAPID riding soon brought the party of Waltermyer to the first swell of the mountain. A rest here was necessary, but the frontiersman granted it grudgingly, for his iron frame despised repose when any exciting purpose urged him forward. With the horse he was master of, an animal that between sun and sun had coursed his hundred miles, it was very difficult for him to realize that the steeds of others could grow faint upon so short a trail. But his keen eye told him that some of these poor wretches, at least, were sorely distressed, and his kind heart would not permit of cruelty to the meanest beast alive; yet he chafed at the moments thus wasted, as he said, when one in whom he had become so strangely interested was a prisoner, either with the Indians, or—and, in his view of the matter, far worse—the Mormons.

"Lite, boys, lite," was his command, "and give your horses a good rubbin' down, though it ain't of much use, neither, nussin' up such good for nothin' but pullin' beasts. Thar isn't five miles an hour left in any one of them, and ef we catch the red-skins, we'll have to travel faster than that by a considerable sight. But give them a good rubbin' down, and, ef worst comes to worst, it will help them to get back to the train."

"Then you think, Waltermyer, that there is little chance of overtaking them?" asked the anxious father.

"Yours, yes. And I might as well tell you the truth, stranger, now as any time. I've kept it back because I was rale sorry for you, and couldn't find words soft enough. Kirk Waltermyer calls himself a man, but he has a woman's heart about some things, and when he sees a fine old gray-headed chap like you a-weepin' for a daughter, he can't help thinkin' of a sister he had once—a little blue-eyed darlin', that went to sleep when the early snow-flakes were fallin', and never woke again."

The stout frontiersman drew a hand across his eyes to free them from the tears that swelled into them.

"God knows how much I love Esther, and—"

"Esther? Yes, I had almost forgotten; but the little child that the minister said had gone to heaven to be an angel—them war his own words, stranger—was named Esther. Est—little Est, I used to call her, and—but, stranger," and his words were toned down into a deeply-breathed whisper, as if coming from the very bottom of his heart, "but, stranger, do you think a man that has lived the life I have can ever go thar?" his finger was pointed reverently upward as he spoke, and an anxious glance shone out through his tears.

"Heaven is ever in sight, my friend. It is as near to you here in the wilderness, as if you lived within the sound of church-going bells."

"Stranger, I thank you." He wrung the hand of Morse convulsively, and then continued: "Yes, stranger, Kirk Waltermeyer, thanks you, and that is a thing he doesn't often do, for he has lived with Diggers and Greasers until he has got to be a'most as unpolite as they are. I have often thought of this thing when ridin' along alone over the wide perarers, but never had any schoolin', and, therefore, couldn't make up my mind. Sometimes, stranger, I have thought I heard that far-off bell tolling again, just as it did when they laid poor little Est in the ground. And then again, when campin' by myself—when layin' out nights, with nothin' under me but the bare ground, and nothin' over me but the starry blanket they call heaven, I have thought I could see her blue eyes looking down upon me, and have heard her whisper, just as she used to do, 'Now I lay me down.' I've forgotten the rest, stranger, but I always try to be better afterward, for poor little Est's sake."

There was something so pitiful in the sorrow of the hardy frontiersman, so unusual and different from any that he had before seen, that Miles Morse felt that the accustomed common expressions of condolence would be entirely out of place, and wisely refrained from giving them utterance. Ah, when such men weep—when their strong natures are melted into tears, be sure the grief is deep, and far too sacred for human cure. Believe, full surely, that there is a spot somewhere, concealed

though it be from public gaze, a sacred cleft in which a tiny flower is budding for heaven.

Incompetent to give sympathy, there remained but one way to give Waltermyer relief, that of changing the subject, and this Morse hastened to do, believing that his volatile nature would soon recover. And in this he was right. A prairie life is one of constant changes and excitement. Few are the moments that can be spared from watchfulness, amid its ever-present danger, to give to regret. The tear must be dashed from the eye to sight the deadly rifle, and the hand that is performing the last acts of affection for the departed must turn hastily away for self-protection. It is a school, the like of which there is not elsewhere on earth, for training men to be self-reliant, brave to recklessness, scornful of privation, uncaring for hardship, and steady and unquailing in the hour of strife. Turn to the blood-written records of Henry, Donelson, Pittsburg Landing, and read there the proof of the matchless daring, unflinching bravery, and almost hopeless victories won by our frontiersmen—the hardy, prairie-nurtured and trained gladiators of the West.

“You were going to tell me,” continued Morse, after a pause that he deemed sufficient to allow the turbulent waters in the breast of Waltermyer to subside, “you were going to tell me something that you couldn’t find words to express. This is what you were saying.”

“Soft words, stranger, soft words. Yes, I was, but poor little Est put it all out of my mind. Forget it, and don’t think me a baby for cryin’ about one who has been so long dead.”

“Forget it? I think the better of you for it. It shows you have a heart, and that it is in the right place. No brave or true man forgets his little ones who are sleeping beneath the cold sod of the valley.”

“Truer words you never spoke, and the memory of that dear little child that God took to be a bright-winged angel—yes, them was the very words the old minister used—has kept me from many a sin out on the frontier.”

“May it always do so.”

“And now, then, about what I was a-goin’ to say. Ef I don’t word it softly, stranger, you must forgive me, for it’s the tongue and not the heart.”

"You need no apology. Go on, friend."

"Friend, yes. Waal, I will try to earn that name. And now, stranger, what I was a-goin' to say was this. *You can't follow this trail any longer.*"

"Not follow the trail? You must be mad."

"No, no. I only wish I was. You're an old man, and the hard ridin' and hot work we've had is tellin' on you. You need rest and must have it or you will die right out. Stranger, a horse or a deer that outruns its strength falls suddenly. I know the nature of the beasts and I allow its just the same with humans. Then, too, you haven't a horse in the hull crowd that could stand an hour's journey in the mountings. Besides it will soon be dark—dark as a pile of black snakes, for thar is no moon to-night, and he who rides must have a sure hand and an eye that is used to followin' trails."

"Alas, you but speak the truth. But my daughter? My poor, poor child?"

"Didn't you say just now that the Lord was on the perarer the same as in the great cities? I believe you did, and I believe it's gospel truth. But your Esther shall not want a friend, if it was only for the sake of the poor little child that was named for her."

"But what shall I do?"

"You and the boys must stop here. When it gets to be dark you will see the light from the fires of your train yender. La Moine would never pass that camping-ground. It's a cl'ar road—no sloos or rocks between, and you ought to ride it in two hours. I've done it many a time in half the time. You must go there and tell the Frenchman that Kirk Waltermyer says he mustn't move until he hears from him."

"But suppose any accident should happen to you?"

"Accident! Well, stranger, thar mought be such a thing, that's a fact, but I don't believe it," and he laughed as if disaster to him was an utter impossibility. "Anyhow, you keep quiet thar, and if I don't come back within three days and bring your daughter safe and sound, tell La Moine to take the back track, hunt up my bones and bring them in."

"And I?"

"Must trust in heaven. Kirk Waltermyer will have done all that was possible for man to do."

"I believe it must be as you say. The horses, poor things, are worn out, and I feel that I could not long endure riding. But had you not better take some of the boys with you?"

"Not a single one. They would only bother me."

"Go, then, friend, and if you do not come back within three days I myself will follow, and never rest until I have found you if alive, and if dead, which kind heaven avert—make for you a grave."

Again a tear stood in the eye of Waltermyer. He strove to speak, but the words were lost in his throat. A strong, hearty shake of the hand was the only thanks he was able to return, then, as if fearing to trust himself further, he whistled his horse to his side, sprung upon his back without touching the stirrup, and with a wave of his hand dashed toward the frowning steeps and disappeared.

The disconsolate parent followed his advice, and just as the guard was changed at midnight, reached the train—there to relate the story of their wanderings—hear of the attack and repulse of the Indians, and then, after partaking of food and drink, to fall into the dreamless, all-forgetting slumber that follows arduous toil.

Waltermyer reached the rocky bed of the cañon, muffled his horse's feet so as to deaden as much as possible the sound of his footsteps without lessening his speed or rendering him liable to fall. He stripped his steed of every thing except his bridle, making his load easy as possible, then again mounting urged him forward. The twilight was just beginning to gather around him when he parted from his comrades, and soon the shadows settled thickly in his path. Blacker still they became until night had enveloped the earth in a starless, moonless vail.

"Black as a mounting of black minks," muttered the lone rider to himself, and then, as if pleased with the idea, he continued: "and I reckon them reptiles are e'en a-most as black as you are, Star," and he patted the neck of his horse. "How I pity any one that has to ride in such a night. Ef that gal is abroad now she will—as I live ef it hain't a-goin' to rain, too. Thar fell a drop—a great, big drop pat on my hand.

Hark ! that rumblin' way up in the hills means thunder and nothin' else. Waal, waal, we're goin' to have a night of it, and I allow it's lucky that I didn't bring them green boys along with me. Softly, pet—steady, boy."

A sudden flash—a living chain of fire that flashed before the horse, dazzling and blinding, had for an instant startled him, and it needed both voice and rein of the master to control him for a moment ; but when another followed and the rolling thunder shook the very rocks beneath his feet, he was calm, and, unmoved, felt his way along the dangerous path. Felt, for even the eyes of the quadruped will fail when the flood-gates of a night-storm are suddenly thrown open and the lurid glare of lightning fills earth and sky.

The slowly-dropping rain became a torrent, and the wind, aroused from its slumber in the hills, came raving through the rain, and howled a terrible anthem among the mountains. Moaning it crept among the crevices in the rock, and howling it swept through the high-walled cañon, and wrestled with the tortured trees and shook the granite portals of the mountain. Catching the huge drops in its embrace, it whirled them in fleecy mist aloft—ragged, torn, drifting away into the black darkness. The deep-worn gulleys in the gray old rocks were aflood with water—the cañon's floor a roaring river, and still the pitiless wind-driven sleet fell deluge-like. Along the inky sky the lightning played, flashing its red bolts—twining in many a fantastic link its burnished gold—tinging the cloudy rifts with shining white, and lighting up cavern and crevice as with shooting star-light. Oh ! it was grandly sublime !—a panorama of light and blackness—of gloom and brightness—of blackest chaos and of burning light, and shown to such music as the world can only know when the fingers of Jehovah plays upon the lightning-strings, and the thunder-gun of heaven is fired from the murky battlements of the whirlwind. Such was the mountain storm in which the frontiersman found himself.

" Oh ! night, and storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong," sung he of the gloomy lyre years ago, and there, where Jura answered, came such sounds and flashing bolts as rung around the head of that brave frontiersman as he bowed his head to the storm, thinking, save now and then of

the little one that was above, of the one below, who might even then be forced by savage warriors to struggle with the tempest as he was doing.

But there was little of written poetry in Waltermyer, and if there had been, custom had blunted his taste for the beauty of a night thunder-storm in the wilderness. He knew the danger of the path that he was traveling at any time—even in the daylight—but now? Death was lurking beneath every footfall. And yet, knowing this, he gave no thought to his own safety or made any effort to escape the beating force of the storm. The mad rushing of the rain, the roaring of the angry thunder or the blinding glare of the lightning was nothing to him. A girl, a feeble girl, was waiting for him to rescue her from the hands of savage warriors, and all the fiends of the storm could not have forced him to pause for his own safety. Besides, he knew that Indian warriors would not travel on a night like that, and if she was still in their hands, he could gain upon them. Shrewdly surmising at what point and under what shelter they would pause, he kept on his dangerous way.

His horse stumbled; he sprang to the ground—if such a flinty floor could so be called—in an instant, and removed the muffings from the animal's feet. Then, as the path became more steep, he led him carefully—trying every step before he ventured his weight upon it. And thus, brave heart, he moved still slowly along, while the sky was ablaze and the thunder boomed in his ear, mingled with the shrill whistle of the wind, the rattle of the falling rain, and the crash of tree-boughs beating against each other.

CHAPTER XII

LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS—AN UNEXPECTED GUIDE—REST.

WHEN the battle between the Mormons and the Indians composing the company of Black Eagle was at its height, Esther Morse was forced to be a looker on. Tied firmly to her seat in the saddle, with only her hands at liberty and with her savage captor at her very side, she dared not make a movement toward escape. But when the strong arm of the white man had stricken the red one to the earth, and she was comparatively unwatched, the brave girl gave her steed the rein, and urging him forward soon disappeared up the valley.

So intently had the combatants been playing the game of blood that no one saw her go, knew of her going, or could tell when or whither she had flown.

Ah! a noble steed was the one that Esther Morse rode that night, worthy to carry so fair a load. Whirling around the nearest point of rocks, she paused but long enough to release her limbs from their bonds and prepare herself in the best manner in her power for easy horsemanship. Then, without the slightest knowledge of the road she must travel in order to gain her friends, she hurried on, striking into a downward path that she hoped would end in the prairie. The fear of recapture was greater in her breast than death itself; so she rode on recklessly over paths that, at another time, would have made her heart sink and her head turn giddy. Many a time she looked anxiously back, thinking that she heard the clatter of pursuing footsteps; then finding that it was the echo of the hoofs that were so faithfully and swiftly bearing her on, a faint smile would ripple for a moment over her face, banishing the stern lines of anxiety and pain. But these gleams of incipient joy were transient as summer lightning, for reality stood too near with its stern danger. The sky was too black, and heavily veiled with clouds, to admit of the star-light flashing through, unless by chance there might be parting rifts that permitted a gleam now and then to reveal how dreary her path was.

Alone in the mountains! Few minds can compass the meaning of the words, for they know neither of the dangers or the fears that surround a position so terrible. But that brave rider was thinking only of escape, and when night and storm indeed settled around her, she awoke as from a pleasant dream. The companionship of any one wearing the semblance of mortality would have been pleasant then, for the fearful stories she had heard and read came back to her mind with terrible acuteness, and in each shadow darker than the rest she saw the form of a wild beast panting for her blood. There were wild beasts abroad it is true, but the storm that drove them to their dens and hiding-places—the pitiless rain that drenched her through and through, was her safety.

Storm? Yes; for the same lurid glare and terrific thunder that appalled even Waltermeyer was sweeping and crashing around her. An untrained horse would have swerved and been dashed to atoms on the ragged rocks hundreds of feet below—would have missed his footing and plunged down the gulf, hurling his rider a shapeless mass to the bottom. It was a terrible ride—terrible for any one, and how much more so for a feeble girl, lost in the rocky wastes of the inhospitable mountains and fleeing for her very life.

The bridle slipped from her grasp. The cold rain and numbing atmosphere rendered the hand powerless to hold it longer, and while the clang of the firmly-placed hoofs fell hopefully upon her ears in the lull of the tempest, she poured out her soul in prayer to Him who holds the earth in the hollow of his hand.

Up! still up! Oh! how strangely she has missed her road! Not to the sloping prairie—not to the level paths, where her father's train was camped, did she bend her way, but still higher—ever higher, toward the dizzy summits where the eagle builds its nest and seeks no companionship save from its kind.

Upward! still upward, where the sure foot of the mountain goat dare hardly travel, and where the mists hang heavy with death and chilling dews. Oh! will that rising trail never end? Will the point never be reached where the foot can no higher press the flinty road—the winding, serpent-like course that glides along the frowning wall above and perpendicular precipice below?

A sudden, blinding flash! A glare as if the veil of night had been rent, and in one unbroken flood let the starry glory through. Then all was utter blackness! Chilled to the very heart, unable longer to retain her upright position, she crouches in the saddle, and bends downward until her long hair, loosened from confinement, mingled with the milky, wind-tossed mane of the gallant steed. Her arms clasp his arched neck—she clings to it for life, and, half fainting, with closed eyes, is borne along—whither?

Whither? The brave horse strains still upon the rocks, but when, where, will his journey be finished? It is past midnight and the thunder has ceased. The darkness is terrible, but the flood-gates of heaven are closed and the drenching torrent has exhausted itself. Shivering, hopeless, she clings wildly to that drooping neck with the grasp of one sinking beneath the swell of a strong tide. She feels her clothes brushing against the stony walls, and shudders, feebly feeling that any moment she may be swept off and hurled—whither? She dares not think—dares not dwell upon her fearful situation. The thought thrills her with horror. Her only hope is centered, next to God, upon the rare animal of which she has so strangely become possessed—upon his keen eye and sure foot. If he falters—if his foot should chance to fall upon a rolling stone or fail to span the yawning chasm, then—what then? She has no strength to picture the horror that would follow.

On! good steed. On! thou desert-born! A priceless human life is hanging on those firmly-planted hoofs. On! champion of the prairie, with thy white mane and tail waving like phantom banners in the darkness. On! There must be no pause for rest, till that poor shivering creature finds a shelter. Alone, unguided, horse and rider tread the perilous way, but with instinct nearly allied to mind, the steed carries his fair burden patiently, but still upward. There is strength in his sinewy limbs, and fire in his eyes—swift blood coursing through his veins and courage in his heart; but beware! The fiends of death are weaving their spells in the dark valley,—their stakes are set and toils ready to snare thy unsuspecting feet.

Is it a dream—some phantom of the brain? Can it be that

she is losing the balance of mind, or is it a joyful reality that the path becomes more level—even downward, and the horse steps more surely and promptly, as if a firm hand were upon the bridle-rein? Intently, thrilled to the very heart's core, she listens, but the hollow tramp of the steed alone greets her ear. Dare she look? Would she see again the form of her savage persecutor? Was she once more a prisoner? Alone with him, that red-browed warrior, the Black Eagle, on the mountain crest, in darkness and midnight? The thought was death.

Yes; the course is downward! That much she knows. But is she still a lonely wanderer? Ah! to solve that question might well have tired stronger nerves than hers, especially when stretched as they had been to the utmost tension by anguish and fear. But, suspense was not to be endured. Look she did, but without raising her head. She looked and closed her eyes, shuddering. An Indian was leading the horse carefully forward! Her worst fears had proved fatally true; the blackness of the night was as sunshine, when compared to the terror that seized upon her.

An hour of silence—an hour that had been lengthened out into days by her agony—then her steed halted. A hand was laid gently upon her shoulder, as if to arouse her. She sprung wildly to the ground.

"Off!" she exclaimed. "Don't touch me, for heaven's sake, or I shall die!"

The night had broken away from the mountains. The earth was fresh and fair around her. Leafy pine and feathery hemlock framed the spot on which she was standing, and dripping with rain, they filled the air with their resinous odors. Every object was clear to her vision. She took courage from the growing light, and began to wonder why the Indian she had so passionately addressed, returned no answer. She turned toward him—her savage tormentor, whom her very soul loathed—and saw, not the Black Eagle, but the proud form and clear, calm eye of the mountain chief, Osse 'o.

Something like a smile lurked in the corners of his clearly-cut mouth, and flitted over his bronzed features. He spoke to her in the same measured and musical tones she so well remembered.

"The child of the pale-face is safe. The *gens du lac* found her wandering alone in the mountain." Inadvertently, perhaps, he addressed her in the language of the Dacotahs, and then, as if remembering himself, repeated the words in French, and perceiving that she understood him, continued:

"When the storm was howling its wildest, and the red bolts were quivering to earth from the bow of the great Manitou, Osse 'o saw his own white horse flash through the darkness like the horse that shall bear the warrior when he has passed the dark valley. Osse 'o's heart filled with joy, for he knew the steed at once, and was wandering himself afoot."

"But I saw you hurled from the precipice," gasped the girl, gazing upon the Indian with her strained eyes.

"The great Manitou that gives to the eagle wings can keep his children from harm. The hounds of death were howling for his blood in the rocky caves below; he was swinging on a branch as slender almost as the hair which falls from that head. A white man—one of her own tribe in skin, but not in heart—raised his fire-weapon, and the bullet hissed as it passed through his hair." The Indian removed his otter-cap, and pointed to a hole in it.

"Good heaven! can this be true? A white man shot at you when you were swinging over that fearful abyss!"

"There are black hearts among Indians and white men alike. It was the sachem of the Lake of Salt."

"The Mormon! Thank mercy it was none of my people."

"The trail has been long, the night cold, and the girl of snowy skin trembles like a dove when the hawk is swooping down to wet his beak in her blood."

"Yes; I am very, very cold."

"By that tree, scarred and splintered by the forked lightning, there is a cave. Let her go and rest within it. Osse 'o will build a fire to warm her limbs, and bring her food. She must rest. He will watch her while she sleeps."

"But you are—"

"A Dacotah!"

"And the Black Eagle?"

"Will never find her. But she trusts no Indian face, she fears Osse 'o. He means her no harm."

"No, I do not; but—"

"The tongue speaks, but the heart feels."

"I will trust you, for you have been very kind to me. Still, you are an Indian, and a stranger."

"I am a MAN!" was the proud reply, and taking her hand, he led her, unresisting, into the cavern of the mountain.

As if touched, insulted, by her doubts, he spoke no further, but hastily collecting the remnants of a former fire that lay scattered around the floor, and had been effectually protected from the storm, he very soon kindled a blaze that was grateful indeed to the shivering girl. Then leaving her, he hastened to the thicket and soon returned loaded with fragrant pine-boughs, and after carefully arranging and covering them with smaller and softer ones, he motioned her to rest. From some clear spring near the cave, he brought, in a hastily improvised cup of leaves, a cool draught, and held it to her lips, as one would have given drink to a child, for he saw that reaction was taking place, and her trembling hands almost refused their office. From a pouch that hung on the wall, he took dried deer meat and pounded corn, and after boiling the former carefully, placed it in her lap upon a plate of bark.

"My horse," he said, turning to go.

"Oh! forgive me for having doubted you. I was mad with that fearful ride," she pleaded, touched to the heart, not only by the care he had bestowed on her, but by the truly gentle and respectful manner in which it had been performed, so entirely different from any thing she had before seen among the Indians.

But he either did not heed or cared little for her words, for he abruptly left her side, and then, apparently touched by the tears that had gathered in her eyes, and the sad shadows upon her face, returned, and almost whispered, in his strangely thrilling voice:

"Let the daughter of the pale chief sleep. Let her banish the black thoughts from her heart. She would go again to the moving wigwams of her people. It shall be so. But first she must renew her strength by slumber. The *gens du lac* will keep guard, and she may rest safely as if her mother rocked. When the sun is high, and birds that love the bright gold of noon are singing their songs of praise to the

good Manitou, then will Osse 'o call her and the trail shall begin."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks. Yes; I am very weary. But my poor, poor father."

"There will be joy again in his heart. Sleep! The herbs of the forest are sweet as the rose-scented gardens of the East, where the honey-bee wanders and humming-birds fold their wings in the cups of flowers. Sleep, lady, sleep; the Wahkan Tanka, the Supreme Spirit of earth, air and water, ever guards the pure in heart. Sleep."

With these words the Indian left her. She watched his tall, graceful form as it passed from the cavern, and was seated at the entrance with the face turned away. Faint and worn out, she lay down in the couch of fresh pine-branches and strove to sleep, but wild fancies haunted her tired brain, and she could not hush them into slumber while the strange man's shadow fell across the mouth of the cave. Who could he be, with the garb of a savage and graceful courtesy which marks the highest civilization? Truly, he was an Indian, but with that voice, those gentle words, it was difficult to think of him as a savage. He had been kind to her as a brother, and evidently meant her well. Or—her heart bounded again, as if serpent-stung—could all this be treachery? She put this idea aside. Then the scene changed and she thought of her father, of his agony at her loss, of his brave heart but aged limbs toiling on the mountain trail to rescue her, of his patient sufferings and utter forgetfulness of self. But again she looked and saw Osse 'o still seated as before, but with his head bowed upon his hands. Could he, also, have bitter thoughts? Did the heart of an Indian ever feel the fierce passions that cause the sufferings she was enduring?

"Oh, shame! shame!" almost burst from her lips, as she reflected how nobly he had acted, and then her folded arms received the aching head, and she softly wept herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DACOTAH'S CAMP—LOVE'S TRIUMPH.

SURPRISED as the Black Eagle was at the escape of his fair prisoner, he was too free from the superstitions of his people for any idea that she had disappeared by supernatural means. But for the certainty that Osse 'o had been thrown over the precipice by his own hands, to meet a death which no mortal power could avert, he might have suspected that singular man of being the agent of her escape; but no human agency was apparent here. The girl must have extricated herself in the height of the *melée*, and urged her horse off in wild desperation. Ignorant of the trail, she must still be wandering in the mountains, and to discover and bring her back was his first business. He waited, however, to see such of his band as had been wounded properly cared for, as that was a duty no Indian chief could delay with impunity. Then, leaving a guard to protect them from the wild animals that a scent of blood had drawn prowling to the neighborhood, he gathered up the rest of his force, and took the backward trail.

It was not difficult to find the trail, or, for a time, follow its windings. But when it had led him into the most intricate fastnesses of the mountain, the thunder-storm burst out in its furious wrath, and he stood in the depth of the wilderness awe-struck and trembling with abject fear. The angry Manitou was howling fierce wrath upon him for the cowardly murder he had done. Struck with terror by this idea, the stout warrior of the forest fell upon his face and shrunk his limbs together, groveling close to the earth, in dread of the fiery arrows that came shooting through the leaves, while the mountain on which he lay reverberated with thunder-bursts. As every battle-note of the storm swept over him, he clung closer to the earth, till the eagle-plume on his head was trailed in mud, and his rich barbarian garments were dripping with rain. When the telegraph of heaven sent its subtle fluid athwart the face of the mountain, a cold shiver ran through

him, and he cried aloud in his wild Indian tongue, pleading for mercy. His only answer was a fresh burst of thunder, more vivid gleams of lightning, a wilder turmoil among the giant forest-trees, which brought him up from the earth in a fierce panic. When this fresh outbreak of the storm had gone howling off through the wilderness, he sunk crouching to the earth again, and in the darkness and drifting rain, blinded, chilled, and shocked to the soul—a very wreck of savage pride and saaaage perfidy.

“The Wabkan Tanka is angry with his children,” whispered a savage, who sat near him. “He has sent the dark-winged spirits of the evil one to upheave the strong mountains, and topple down the lofty cliffs.”

“The spirits of the Wabkan Shecha are here!” replied the Black Eagle, shaking in all his limbs, when a fiercer crash burst upon their ears, and a tree was splintered and fell in blazing ruins almost at their feet, lightning-struck, and illuminating all the rocky points of the mountain. •

“Let the children of the Dacotahs turn back to their wigwams. The Great Spirit hates the trail their moccasins are following. He has sent the fire-eyed ones from his giant wigwam, in the far-off clouds, to warn them,” cried an old warrior, starting up in the red light of the stricken tree.

“When they met the sons of the pale-face in battle,” cried another, “he turned their arrows aside, made their arms weak as the little pappoose, and their bow-strings snap like the dry reed in the breath of the tempest. Manitou is very angry!”

“Hark!” exclaimed another—for in an hour like that, all the usual etiquette of the council-fire was thrown aside—the pipe was left unsmoked, and the wampum-belt was not passed from hand to hand. “Hark! the chieftains of the Dacotahs are not deaf. They have ears, and they can hear his voice as it was in its anger. They are not blind; they can see the flash of his eye as it lights mountain and prairie with its red glare. Let them go back again to their homes.”

“Yes,” answered the old warrior, stoutly. “When the sun-spirit smiles again upon the world—when its golden wings drive the black-plumed ones to their hiding places, then the foot of the Dacotahs will take the trail. No

horse of the prairie, or moccasin of man can keep their footing in the mountains now."

But with the voices of his people in his ears, Black Eagle shook off his terror. Even in that hour—even in the short lull of the storm which had followed the lightning-stroke that shivered the giant pine of the mountain, and scattered the *debris* in a fiery storm around them, his black heart aroused itself, and resumed its wicked purpose. Again he was plotting treason and weaving crafty spells.

Ah, man! man! how vain is all warning to the selfish and cruel of heart! A moment before, and that wild chief had cast himself to the earth, aghast at the lightning, and crouching in fear at the open-mouthed thunder. But the sky-written lesson of doom passes from his mind while its fire was yet flaming around him.

"See!" whispered one of the warriors to Black Eagle, "See!"

Far down in the valley, but coming noiselessly up the very side of the mountain, climbing as it were along the bald face, a snowy object glides. What is it? what can it be? each Indian asks of the others, for their tongues were fettered by terror. Surely nothing mortal would be abroad in a storm like that; and if a human being could be found so desperate in courage, it was impossible to scale the dizzy cliffs. On—on, still it goes, dimly visible, ghastly white, unearthly, in the dim, bluish gleams of lightning. They look again, and it is gone. Gone even as a smoke-wreath disappears from before the eye, we know not whither. It was a spirit to the many—a wandering semblance of something once belonging to earth. To the Black Eagle, it was the phantom-horse of his murdered brother, that, killed among the rocks, was wandering, ghost-like, seeking for his late master. But if this was so—and his superstitious soul could not shake the belief off—where, then, was the girl for whom he had ventured and lost so much?

But the wind sobbed itself to sleep, the black clouds were no more riven by flame, and the earth was left unshaken by the thunder—the airy fountains had dashed themselves to spray against the rocks. The world wrapped itself in the mantle of darkness and slept, still shivering under the storm

that had passed over it. The solemn silence of the calm followed the terrific crashing of the tempest, and slumber settled heavily down upon the travel-stained and weary band of red-men, whose strength had been exhausted by their fears.

Is it true that angels guard us when we slumber, and, awake, leave us to temptation, and perchance crime? In the hour of darkness, is there an unseen, unknown power, that watches by our pillows, blunts the edge of the assassin's knife, and turns the glittering steel aside? If such a power there be, (and who will dare dispute it?) then it kept watch and ward of the sleeping warriors of the Dacotahs—blood-stained and merciless as they were, in that almost unsheltered bivouac. When the weight pressed upon eye and brain, and when the body was most leaden, there crept into their midst, timidly, and as that spirit might have taken form had it really watched there, Waupee, the abandoned wife of Black Eagle. Bitter, indeed, must have been the passion, and deep the love which had so long kept her upon the trail of her husband, and severe must have been the toil she had endured tracking him, like a sleuth-hound among the winding-paths of the mountains. Love, fiery love—the one master-passion of an Indian woman's life—must have been entirely blotted out, and all the serpents that lurk among human passions in the hour of its darkness, must have entered and held triumphant sway in her savage nature. It is a terrible thing when all the finer feelings of our nature are thrown broadcast to the winds, and standing on the verge of the maelstrom of despair, an immortal soul recklessly plunges into the mad waves beneath, to be whelmed and lost forever!

Groping along in the darkness, with lowly-bent form, and step light as the snow-flake's fall, the Indian woman examined the face and dress of each sleeper. At length she kneels and touches with gentle fingers the fringed leggins and quill-worked hunting-shirt of a chief, who lay somewhat separated from his companions. The garments were dripping with wet, but she knew them. Then her hands are pressed over her beating heart, as if to still the wild outcries that straggled for utterance, or to subdue the terrible pain throbbing there. Her own fingers had woven the mystic emblems she was tracing on the the chief's garments. She had herself

dressed the tough deer skin, embroidered, the curiously-woven ornaments, colored the gaudy horse-hair fringe—and all for whom?

Memory is busy within her inmost soul now. She sees a painted wigwam, at whose base the sleeping waters of the Spirit Lake ripple. The form of one, praised as the beauty of the tribe, sitting and singing as she weaves the sparkling beads into designs of grace and beauty. A manly step falls upon her ear, and her song is hushed, but to drink in far sweeter music to a maiden's ear, the words of affection from the lips of the chosen one who already owns her heart. Then the happy bridal, and the wild, sweet bliss of a love-marriage—the resting of a soul fully satisfied—the low cooing of the dove that has folded its silver wings in its pretty nest, and pours out heart music all the day long! That was a true picture of the past—but now?

Lower bends the lithe form, until the fringe upon her robe mingles with that with which she has adorned her once lover. Even the long locks of her hair, unbraided now, disheveled, wet and heavy, fall upon his face and startle him. Muttering in his sleep, he turns on the earth, throwing his strong arms on either side, and fully exposing the broad breast, heaving with the deep pulsations of a busy heart.

Was there a truer mark for knife or hatchet? Did murder ever gaze upon a surer target for its venomous shafts?

The woman drew back, until all again was still, and then her cold hand searched that broad chest until she felt the throbbing heart beneath. Quick as thought, a slender knife leaps from the concealment of her dress, and flashes like a silver thread in the gloom. The arm is raised on high, the form drawn to its perfect height, the lip compressed, and the nerves braced, and then!

Warrior of the wilderness, if around thy path a good spirit ever flitted—if a white-robed angel ever fanned thy swarthy forehead, or took thee in its holy keeping, now—*now*, let it guard thee from sudden death. Let the broad shield of mercy be held above thee, and that cruel knife be turned aside in the hand of thy wronged wife.

The poised knife descends, cutting the air like the flash of a star-beam. It is driven by a desperate hand. Let the canoe

be waiting on the hither shores of the river of time, to ferry that savage soul to that farther bank that angels call "here after."

No, thank God! She was a savage, but could not stain her innocent hand in blood, wronged though her love had been. The pure, womanly gold triumphed over the base alloy of passion. Once she had loved him; once he had been kind to her; once—it was gone now—all gone; but holy thoughts of those days came back, and she flung the knife from her with a shudder, bowed herself beside the sleeping man, and wept piteously. Ah, triumphant love, undying devotion! Alike in the civilized and savage soul—the last at the cross and the first at the tomb.

As one suddenly awakes from a fearful dream, that poor, sorely tried and tempted woman pressed both hands to her throbbing temples. Then the old deep love surged up through all her wrongs, and asserted its dominion once more. All the wild adoration of her heart in other days came back, baptizing her soul afresh. No, no, she could not murder him sleeping. That head, lying so dusky and massive in the starlight, had been pillowed upon her breast. The heart her knife menaced had beat against her own. He had been kind, very kind, once. But it was death to her to be found near him. She refrained from using her power, but would he prove equally merciful if he awoke. And he was going—whither? There was madness in that thought. Going to seek another and a fairer bride—to put her, the true wife, from his wigwam forever.

Bending still lower, softly, gently, as a mother would caress a sleeping babe, she kissed the full lips, then in silence left the encampment. It was the last kiss—the last—she should ever press upon that false mouth. All the world now was utter darkness to her, the road she traveled uncared for. To flee—flee, as it were, from herself—was the only object she had in view. Swift as a hunted deer she dashed down the mountain side, and away into the wilderness.

At any other time, Dacotah as she was, Waupce would have carefully scrutinized the path, for well she knew that the gaunt bear of the mountain made his den in the caverns and hollow trees around her; that the monarch of the fastnesses

growled his anger when wandering footsteps sounded near his den, and tore the intruder on his domains piecemeal. She knew that each step was margined with danger, from the sliding *débris* on the narrow path, and pitfalls lurked unseen to tempt the foot to press the mimic bridge that concealed destruction. But all fear was swallowed up in one giant heart-pain, and, half distraught, she rushed along, unthinking, and heedless of the end. The serpents of despised, cruelly disdained love, had coiled themselves upon her breast, and stung it into despair. The full wealth of her wifely affection had been crushed and flung wantonly aside, trampled ruthlessly under foot, ground down in the dust, annihilated while yet in the spring-time of its bloom and fragrance. What was left for her but death? She had not been nurtured in the schools of civilized life, which train the lip and eye into smiles, give false roses for the cheeks and lying words of happiness for the tongue, when the only music of the heart is a funeral wail. Poor, uneducated eaglet of the wilderness! Thy pinion had been broken even when soaring most proudly! The shaft of the hunter has found thee! Broken-winged and broken-hearted, what was left for thee but to creep into some lone cavern and die?

The sleep of the party of Black Eagle was long and sound, but their leader was the first astir. Short time was devoted to the preparation of food, and shorter still for council. Night and storm had passed. The glorious morning sun swept away their somber foot-prints, and those savage hearts buoyantly lifted themselves out of their fear, and, forgetful of the stern resolves and penitential promises they had made, clothed anew with daring, went defiantly forth to battle and to sin.

Most craftily Black Eagle worked upon the minds of his followers, painting what sweet revenge it would be upon the white men to repossess themselves of their wandering prisoner, for wandering, unless dead, she must be. The luring bait of gold he also held out to them, and was eloquent on the pleasures of its possession, until, with one accord, his warriors consented to accompany him, and the march of the rescue began.

Rescue? When the fowler takes the bird or the fisherman

the spotted trout from the net, is it for rescue? When the strong-willed and strong-armed man beats back the angry waves, bears the drowning victim ashore on the rocky heights of Patagonia, is it for rescue? See! poised on its light wings, a very spot in the ether, sails the hawk. His slender form is mirrored in the placid tide below, and his keen eye is watching for his scaly prey. There is a sudden dart, a plashing of the water, and a writhing body is torn from its native element, and borne aloft in the talons of the victor. But see, again! like an avalanche an eagle rushes through the startled air, from its look-out on the dry old pine. In mid-air he strikes the conqueror down. Is not he intent upon rescuing the feeble fish? Truly, yes, but for what? Earth is everywhere filled with the answer, and it needs no written words to blazon the burning shame so often hidden in the single word.

Off they go, that dark band of Indian warriors—black wolves, following on the trail of a wounded doe. Better for the poor girl they hunted to have perished in the glare of the lightning, amid the rolling music of the thunder, than meet them in the hour of their wrath.

CHAPTER XIV

WALTERMYER—A CHAMPION.

“WAAL,” exclaimed Kirk Waltermyer, as his good horse floundered along in the darkness, “of all the rides I ever had this is the beat. I’ve heard tell of storms in the mountings, and thought I had seen them, but they were nowhar compared to this. Whew! how the wind tussles with the tree-tops and whistles in the gulches. I tell you, this is some! I’ve half a mind to camp, and would, only—poor little Est! I wonder if the rain falls as heavily, and the wind sighs as mournfully around your grave, my poor gal?”

The recollection of his little dead sister, now ever kept in memory by the name of the young creature he was seeking to save, humanized and softened his usual rough speech. Still

he continued, as if addressing a companion who could reply, and not his faithful horse, with whom his one-sided conversation was held. And yet, if the doctrine of the transmigration of souls were true, might not this matchless steed have been gifted with the keen perception of some great man whose death the world still mourns? We know the foolish falsehood of the story, and yet there exist examples in the brute creation, that, weighed in the scale of worth, would make many a man shrink into littleness.

"I know some horses, Star," he continued, "that I wouldn't ride across this mountain in a dark night—nary a time. No, not for all the gold in Shasta. Hello! what kind of a caper is that?"

The horse had come to a sudden stop—so sudden as to shake even his perfect rider, and stood with braced feet, snorting nostrils, and eyes flashing fire, immovable in limb as if sculptured from the very rock on which he stood, and yet his whole body trembling with fear. His keen sight—far more keen than mortal eye in the darkness—had discovered something unusual in the path before him.

"By heaven!" exclaimed the startled frontiersman, as his ready rifle was braced against his shoulder, "if it hain't an Indian. No, it's a creepin', snarlin' wolf. No, 'tis a b'ar. No, it hain't none of them. It's—by thunder, I don't know what it is;" and he swung himself from his horse, and, bending down, closely watched.

That it was something endowed with life he readily perceived, but what it was he could not make out. Wolf nor bear ever made those stealthy motions, or crept thus slowly along. It was very indistinct, and again he raised his rifle.

"If you be a human, speak," he shouted; "but if a b'ar or a cowardly cayote, then I'm arter your scalp, and no mistake. But no, no; I don't need it, and such a night is enough to make beast and man brothers. No, no, I'll not shoot. Go your way, and if—as I live by bread and buffalo meat, it's gone! I've traveled many a long mile in my day, and this bangs all the other doin's I ever saw. I do think it was a human, or"—and he raised his hand to his head, as if to be certain that his hair would not lift his cap off in terror of

the thought, and his voice dropped to a whisper—"or it mought have been a ghost!"

"Yes, it was a speerit," he whispered, under his breath; "a poor, wanderin' speerit, that can not rest quietly in the grave. Poor soul—who knows but that it mought come back again;" and, for the first time during the night, his spurs touched his horse's flank, and with a great leap the generous brute bounded forward.

But he could not shake the fear from his mind, and he who, single-handed, would have dauntlessly rode into the face of death, now looked anxiously around in the quest of something that his better judgment told him could not exist.

With a feeling of vague terror, Waltermeyer still urged his horse on. He had but one object in view, that was to reach the topmost cliff, and there, when morning's dawn transfigured earth, he could command a boundless view. But the frontiersman had not a heart or mind to linger on imaginary danger.

Soon the cool breeze swept downward, and wantoned with his wet hair, and made merry with his dragged garments, and in its freshness his hardihood returned; even the strain of an old hunting-song leaped upon his lips and struggled for utterance as he rode along.

Clearly above him, through the sharp-cut walls of the cañon, he soon began to see the stars shine brightly, and, as the golden light came shimmering down through the leaves, his way became clear, and he urged his good steed more rapidly forward. Then came the gray of morning, the hour when the cloudy waves of night are at full ebb, and stand transfixed, as it were, with golden arrows for a moment, before the flood of day comes surging from the eastern ocean. In the weird semi-light he rode blithely on. A foaming rivulet that a few hours before had held no drop of moisture rolled before him. The whole earth was refreshed, and he felt the glorious influence.

"Come, Star!" he lifted his horse with hand and rein, and rode boldly in.

To the very saddle-bow sunk the horse, as he plunged in the stream, and the foam-beads danced among his tawny mane as his feet failed to reach the bottom.

"Come, Star! Come, good horse!" and his manly voice rang above even the roar of the swollen waters.

But spur, and rein, and voice were all needed now, and when the noble steed reached the opposite bank, it required all his strength and agility to mount it. His fore-feet rest upon the shelving, rocky brink—he rears for the leap—he rises light as a bird on the wing—his hindermost hoofs strike upon the bank, but the insecure footing gives way—he trembles like a strong man, struggling against a giant in the wrestling ring.

"Come, Star! Once more, my boy!"

A giant effort, and a giant leap, and he stands trembling on secure ground, with the water dripping from his glossy hide, and the snowy spot in his forehead gleaming from amid its blackness—a very blazing star, looking out from a storm.

A moment given only to rest, to the recuperation of the vast energy he has just exhibited, and again that tireless horse takes the upward trail, without a word or sign from his master. But his steps are checked. Not that he needed rest—not that Waltermyer, kind-hearted as he was, and even more than tender of his favorite steed, had become doubtful of his strength; but another vision had crossed his track—a ghost appeared before him.

"By —!" but he strangled the oath, and beat back the impious word, before it could find utterance. "Ef it's not the same thing I saw down below! And it is—hold! don't jump, for your life! Stop, I say! don't do it here!" and his horse sprung, as if gifted with wings, beneath the sharp rowel.

Even in the uncertain light, his well-trained eye had discovered that it was a human being, standing on a rocky shelf full a hundred feet above him, and preparing to spring from the fearful height. Who it was he did not pause to think. Enough for him to know that some fellow-being was in trouble, and bent on self-destruction. In as many seconds the swift horse stood on the shelf of rock, and Waltermyer leaped from its back while in full career.

It was an Indian woman, intent on leaping down that fearful height. Her form was bent, and her arms thrown wildly upward for the terrible leap, when the frontiersman interposed.

"By —!" once more the oath was unuttered.

"Yes, it's a woman!" he continued, as the form became limp, and hung heavily in his arms. "A woman, as I live! May be it's—" he could not speak the name, but, turning up the face tenderly, saw in the dim light, not the white girl he was searching for, but the features of Waupee, the poor heart-broken wife.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, in disappointment. "It is only a squaw;" and then, as if ashamed of himself, he smoothed the long, black hair from the bronzed face, and after laying the poor creature carefully on the ground, hastened to the stream he had so lately passed, and filled his cap with water. Returning hurriedly, he bathed the upturned face. He was a rude nurse, but kind-hearted, and there was something in the utter helplessness of the wretched Indian woman that took a strong hold upon his rough nature, and exercised an influence over him a thousand women under other circumstances would have failed in producing.

"Waal, she's real pooty, too," he muttered, between his teeth. "The pootyest squaw I ever sot eyes on. Who would have thought a red-skinned gal could look so much like a human? But she's waking up now;" and he seated himself by her side, looking at her with eyes full of wonder and pity.

Like a frightened fawn, the Indian woman started from the rock and gazed about her. She had been so suddenly snatched from the jaws of death, had swooned so deeply, that, for a time, she was lost to all surroundings, and when she opened her eyes, it was like one coming out of total darkness into the glaring light of day. Anxiously, afraid almost, she gazed about her—at the coal-black steed—the strong form and face of the frontiersman, and at the cliff beyond. Then, in all its fearful reality the scene came back to her, and burying her face in her lap, she sat for a long time speechless, after the fashion of her people.

"My good woman," began Waltermyer, anxious to break the silence, and yet doubtful how or where to commence, "you came mighty near a-fallin' off the cliff. And now," continued Waltermyer, "as soon as you have rested a little you must git on my horse thar—he's a good and true one

and a sure-footed—and I will take you to a place of safety, if not home.”

“Waupee has no home,” was the sad response.

“No home? Waal, I might say the same of myself. But I s'pose your home is like mine—that is, your tribe's is—any whar, whar the night overtakes you. But cheer up; I will take you to your tribe.”

“Waupee must not go to her tribe.”

“Not go to your people? Waal, this beats natur'”

“A moon ago there was light in her wigwam—now all is darkness. Waupee would have given herself to the dark angels of death. The pale-face saved her and she thanks him. Once before, when the night was dark, she saw him.”

“Saw me?”

“Like a serpent she crawled across his path.”

“You did! Waal, I must have took you for a ghost.”

“The red fiends of murder were in her heart. She was seeking her husband—who turned her out to die, and—”

“The infernal brute!”

“She found him far up in the hills. The sharp knife was in her hand—her arm was raised—”

“But you could not strike him?”

“She had loved him once.”

“Thank God for that!” In the hour of strife, when the hot blood was rioting through the heart, the frontiersman could well and willingly fight his way; but to murder a sleeping man in cold, calculating blood, was a thought that made him, iron-nerved as he was, shudder and grow faint.

“The poor wife he had spurned from his wigwam—the bride of but little more than one small moon—kissed him as he slept, and then turned away forever.”

“That was right—the varmint.”

“She had nothing to live for. Husband, tribe—all was gone. What could she do but die?”

“And so he turned you out—a pooty woman like you, did he?”

For a moment, the black eyes of the Indian woman flashed upon his, as if to learn the meaning of the flattering words he had used, but reading sincerity and not unmeaning compliment in every feature of his face, she replied :

“ He had seen a girl of snowy skin—and carried her away from her friends to fill his wigwam, and—”

“ Hold your horses, thar. A white gal?”

“ Fair as the flowers of spring, with hair like the silk of the maize in the autumn time—eyes like the blue summer sky—cheeks like the climbing rose of the prairie, and lips red as the sumac berries, and voice sweet as the music of spring-waters in the desert.”

“ Whar is she now?”

By degrees, he learned the entire history of Esther's capture—the wandering—the battle and the escape—all except the death of Osse'oo, for of that the woman was ignorant—then his fiery heart burst forth in no measured words. Fierce were the passions that shook his frame, and bitter would have been his revenge if the abductors had stood before him. But even in his wildest torrent of words, there came a controlling, soul-subduing influence. He murmured, “ poor little Est,” and restraining himself, continued :

“ I ought to know most of the chiefs at Spirit Lake. Did I ever meet this Indian?”

“ He is known among the Dacotahs as the Black Eagle.”

“ Black devil! Yes, I know him, and a blacker-hearted fiend never stole horses or murdered peaceful emigrants. Waal, waal, his time will come. But he's but an Indian arter all, and it's his natur', I s'pose; but, as for that rascally Elder, if ever I catch him, I'll make him think that he's tied to a drove of buffaloes, and they are all kicking him at once.”

“ The tongue of Waupee has traveled the trail of truth.”

“ I believe you, gal. Thar hain't no lyin' hid in your looks, like a serpent in the tall sloo-grass. Yes, I believe you.”

“ The pale warrior knows all the poor squaw can tell him. He will follow the trail and the great Manitou will smile upon him. He was very kind to the poor Indian woman, and she will never forget him. Now she will go.”

“ Go? Whar in thunder are you goin' to?”

“ The Manitou will guide her moccasins.”

“ But you said you had neither home or tribe.”

“ She will make for herself a home in the caves of the mountains, and wait patiently until the death-angel shall drive away the white-winged spirit of life.”

"If you do, may I be —! Oh, poor little Est!"

"Where then shall she go?"

"Go? Why with me."

"The chiefs of the pale-face will laugh at their brother for being kind to a woman of the Dacotahs."

"That hain't the safest kind of business, I can tell you, but I don't care for their laughin' My shoulders are broad, and can carry a pretty big load."

"But they will look black on Waupee—will laugh at her wrongs, and trample her heart in the ashes."

"Let them do it ef they dare! Let any one, even if he war my brother, that is, ef I had one, try to crush or hurt the feelin's of a poor creature who has been so trampled upon, and Kirk Waltermyer will teach them a lesson they will remember longer than any thing they ever larned at school."

"The pale-face has been very kind, and the daughter of the Dacotahs will not see him insulted for her sake."

"Now, you just a-hear. I honor you for your feelin's, and like you for your speerit, but I don't go one step without you. So thar! Ef you have made up your mind to camp here until doomsday, why, I'll pitch my tent too, and Star with me."

"Has the pale-face thought of what his tribe will say?"

"Tribe be—blessed. Don't frown, little Est, for that's no swearin'. I hain't any more of a tribe than you have, so just make up your mind to come along quietly like a good girl, and I'll soon show you that Kirk Waltermyer has a heart that beats like a trip-hammer, and always in the right place. He hain't any more given to braggin' than one of your warriors; but if anybody even dares to question about you, they'll find you have got one friend that hain't to be easily handled."

"Waupee will go with the pale-face for a time."

"Waal, I reckon it will be a long time unless you find some better place to camp in than these desolate mountings. Here, Star," and he whistled his faithful horse to his side.

Star came up ready for action. When Waltermyer had drawn the girths tighter and arranged both bridle and saddle to his liking, he lifted the light form of Waupee from the earth before she had the slightest intimation of his intention, and swung her upon the back of the horse with as little difficulty

as if she had been but a feather's weight. The hot blood welled up into cheek, brow, and neck of the woman, and shone ruddy even through her bronzed skin at the action. But the calm face of Waltermyer satisfied her that all with him was perfect kindness and good faith, before even his words had reached her ear.

"Thar now, you'll ride like a princess—though I don't well know what they may be. Onyhow, you're not a-goin' to walk, while I own a horse. I know the braves, as they call themselves in your tribe, make you go on foot while they strut off on thar horses all fiery-fired to death. But I don't and won't!" Thar's no use a-talkin', it's just what Kirk Waltermyer would do for any woman."

"When the pale-face tires, Waupee will walk."

"Tires? Waal, ef that isn't about the richest thing I ever heard. When I tire!"

"But the horse will grow weary. The trail has been a long one and the night stormy."

"My horse grow a-weary? Waal, that's equil to the other! When he gits tired I'll take you in my arms, for not a single step shall a woman walk on such a trail as this, while Kirk Waltermyer draws breath;" and he laid his strong hand on the rein and led the way down the mountain

CHAPTER XV

REVOLT—ALONE ON THE HEIGHTS—TRIAL.

BITTER crimination followed the Mormon leader after his engagement with the Indians, but fortunately for him, no lives had been lost, else, in the passion of the hour, even his supposed sacred character would scarcely have preserved him from punishment at the hands of his followers.

"It ain't no use, Thomas," (he had dropped the "Elder,") "in talking any more about it. I shan't for one go poking about in these hills after a girl that none of us care about."

"But hear me, brother," interposed the Elder.

"I heard more'n enough, now. The fact is I don't believe

more'n half you say, anyhow, and if you was to divide that half by about ten I think it might be better still. Anyhow, I am not a-going with you, and that's flat."

"But think of the poor girl."

"Think of my wife and little children."

"They will be well taken care of. Upon the head of those who disobey and make light of the prophets of the Lord shall fall grievous curses."

"Well, now, fire away with them. I don't think the curses of a man that goes around stealing other folks' children can hurt a man much, anyhow. Come, boys, who's a-going with me?"

A large portion, the greater part in fact, drew away from the Elder and gathered round their champion.

The horse of the self-appointed leader of the dissenting party was turned with his last word, and he started down the mountain path. A few only remained behind, but they, one by one, departed also.

Thomas turned his horse's head toward the scene of the late affray, and, after passing the night crouched low among the rocks where the awful majesty of God was written on the sky in the blazing lightning and spoken in the bellowing thunder, he safely reached it just as morning was shaking roseate light from its glorious wings.

Morning, in all its splendor, was abroad. The mist cleared away, and the dense fog disappeared from the valley. A boundless prospect was opened to the searching eye of this bad man. In the far-off prairie, he could see the train of his people winding slowly along—miniature men and cattle and wagons. Wondering at his absence, they journeyed on. He could see the pine-trees bowing their lofty crests, and whispering to the wind a thousand feet below. But vainly he sought for a trace of the red-man. A tiny smoke, a single curling ribbon of thin, blue vapor rose before his vision—a slender spiral coil of azure floated softly from the earth, and soon lost itself in the clouds. The dry wood, always used by the red-man, gave forth these delicate traces of smoke, and he followed its guidance. But what if he should encounter Black Eagle and his troop of savage warriors when angry with defeat? He still carried more gold about his person, and that

would buy their favor; but might it not, also, be a tempting bait for his own murder? Strangely woven, indeed, was the web of his thoughts, and he was half tempted to sacrifice every thing and return to his followers. He looked after them with this purpose firmly planted in his heart; but the long train of white-covered wagons had disappeared in the distance, and, almost sadly, he again pressed forward.

A huge black timber wolf, the most savage of all the monsters of the mountain, crossed his path—stopped for a moment, and gazed upon him with bloodshot, fiery eyes and snapping jaws. The Elder raised his pistol and fired. The swift-winged ball cut a shallow furrow, and the beast bounded, howling, away, while up the crags and into the caverns leaped the report. There was more than one wolf traveling that path—more than one searcher after innocent kids. The many were the wolves of nature—the one that of unbridled passion.

The wounded beast sought its bone-strewed lair to brood in darkness over its pain. The pistol had been truly aimed, but its effects had proved far more fatal upon the man who fired it than on its intended victim. His horse sprang at the report, reared high, bounded upward with a desperate plunge, and threw the careless rider among the bushes that lined the narrow trail. Then, freed of his burden, and exempt from all controlling influences, he darted wildly down the mountain, his iron-armed hoofs ringing upon the flinty rocks, from which they sent forth a stream of flashing sparks.

The Mormon arose uninjured, and gazed wildly around him. Now he felt utterly alone!

Shaken in every limb—the victim of a double accident by his reckless horsemanship, and with his garments still wet and stiffened from the storm, he was forced to clamber up the rocks as best he might, with the dark shadows of coming evil gathering thickly around him. Weapon, save the one now partially discharged, he had none—the other was in the holsters; of food he had not a single mouthful, for the scanty remnant of his stores was also tied to his saddle. If he could not find the Indians—if his strength should fail him, he must abide that most horrible of all deaths—starvation!

The smoke that had lured him onward—where was it

now? No trace of it was upon the air, as far as the eye could reach.

Still on he toils. The sun rises hot and blinding. Its fiery rays, concentrated in the prison-like opening of the cañon, fall with intense fury upon his head. The very rocks appear molten beneath his feet; and as he struggles on, almost bewildered, a burning thirst seizes him—a living flame is kindled in his vitals. Faint—fainter—yet still on! Is death coming on him now? Will the black buzzards feast upon him, and wild wolves wrangle for his bones? Like the miraculous outgush of water which leaped forth from the cleft rock smitten by the prophet, a crystal fountain came leaping from the hollows of a cliff just before him—leaping joyously over its shelf of mossy rock, and sending up its spray, shimmering in the sunshine like a network of golden lace.

The Elder crept to the base of the rock, over which this current leaped, and kneeling down, drank of its cool tide as it rushed off to a neighboring ravine, and lost itself among tangles of fern and forest-shrubs. The cool draught appeased his raging thirst, and he looked about more hopefully. He stood upon one side of a rocky hollow, into which the torrent dashed its waters, troubling them with flashing beauty. A little way off, on the broken edges of the basin opposite, a serpent, glittering in all its native splendor of burnished green, and red and gold, raises its crest, and looks on him with its glittering eyes. Man and reptile alike had tasted the waters. The one steals slowly away, rustling on its winding trail—a thing of fear, but innocent in its desires; while the other starts back in terror, and slowly resumes his uncertain, dangerous way.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOMEWARD TRAIL—THE STRANGE MEETING—FOEMEN.

ESTHER MORSE slept long and refreshingly. When she awoke, a single glance at the form seated still at the entrance of the cavern brought all the circumstances of the present back to her mind, and she arose, flinging aside the heavy

hunting-shirt with which the Indian had protected her from the chill.

"The daughter of the pale-face has slumbered well," said the Indian, rising and coming toward her.

"Yes, oh! how much I have to thank you for—and you?"

"When the maiden slumbers the warriors keep watch."

"But you robbed yourself of your garments to protect me. How very, very kind."

"The red-man is accustomed to the cold breath of the mountains and does not feel it," said the Indian, turning away.

Hunger is a rare luxury after all. The researches of Ude or Soyer have never found any thing to rival it. No *epicurean* dainties can match the exquisite pleasure found in its gratification. A night in the mountains, drinking in the very breath of life—the pure, clear, bracing air—a breakfast hot from the glowing embers and a draught of water from the icy brook, are worth more than all the exquisite dishes that ever man invented. It needed no urging, therefore, for the girl to satisfy the cravings of her keen appetite. In after years she might feast from silver and crystal spoons on tables groaning with costly luxuries, but that delicious breakfast from the rude brick plate—the smoking venison, and the ruddy flakes of the spotted trout—the mountain bivouac and the mountain appetite—was never to be equaled in her life again.

When Esther had completed her repast, Osse 'o stood leaning against the entrance of the cave—the rocky pilaster that upheld the giant but irregular rustic arch above, and listened to the story of her captivity. Briefly, at his request, she gave the painful particulars, for it was necessary that he should know them in detail in order to form his future plans. A lightning flash of the eye—a stern compression of lips—a sudden swelling of the thin nostril, and a heaving of the breast, alone betrayed the indignation that was passing within. His figure remained as motionless as the rock against which he leaned.

"The sun is well up and the streams have run themselves low—the leaves are dry and the moss no longer slippery," was his response, when she had concluded, without in the slightest manner alluding to what he had just heard. "Osse 'o knows well what trail the white man will travel,"

"But my father—my dear, dear, father!" exclaimed the girl. "He could not have followed me."

"The trail of the daughter must be straight as the crow flies to the moving wigwams of her people. When she is in safety, Osse 'o will find her father—or die."

"Die? oh! not that. You have been so kind—so like a brother to me. Surely there is no danger to you."

"The way may be long and the trail winding. When the girl of the pale-faces is ready, we will go."

"Ready? Now, this instant. Come, I have no fear." She placed her hand in his as she spoke, and smiled as he clasped it in his hard palm.

For a single moment only the Indian held it in his tight grasp, then he uplifted it slightly as if he would have raised it to his lips, but with a grave sadness in his eyes he checked the impulse, slowly releasing his grasp, and turned toward his horse that stood ready prepared for the march. He offered her his foot as a step from which she could mount the horse.

What a game of living cross-purposes was playing then in the mountains? Waltermeyer, a white man, had become the protector and guide of an Indian woman. Osse 'o, a Dacotah, was performing the some services for a white girl. Black Eagle and his followers were hunting for Esther, and the Mormon seeking for them. All traveling, in reality, blind paths—pursuing the end of a trail that was shifting every hour—seeking each other as a baffled man might search for a name written in sand on the sea-shore.

With his hand upon the bridle-rein, the Indian walked almost by Esther's side, cheering and guiding the horse. When the narrow trail caused her to shrink back from the dizzy brink on one side until she brushed the perpendicular wall of rocks on the other—when the descent became steep—when the path was cumbered with loose stones—when an overhanging branch threatened to sweep her from the saddle—when the rocky bed of the *arroya* was deep and the current strong—when more than usual danger lurked around her in any form, he pressed still nearer, warned her of the danger in deep, earnest whispers—whispers whose undertone was more like the lower notes of a flute than a human voice—and held her firmly with his strong arm.

All that is beautiful in human tenderness was concentrated in these guarding cares. In her gratitude and her admiration, Esther forgot every thing which might have revolted her at another time.

"See!" said Osse 'o, as he paused to breathe his steed for a moment. "Far off toward the setting sun are your father's wagons—the pale-man's traveling home. Like little rifts of snow they lie whitely in the distance."

"So near? Let us hurry on. Each moment seems a lifetime till I reach my father."

"The trail winds round the mountains like a serpent, and even this good horse must rest. Within an arrow's shot below, though it takes miles to reach it, is a huge rock level at the top. A thousand warriors could camp upon it, and yet find room for more. There I will build a fire and rest. Then Osse 'o will guide the girl of the pale-faces to her father."

Without giving her an opportunity to reply, he led the horse rapidly forward until they reached the plateau he had briefly described.

To the very center of this camping-ground, where it abutted against an abrupt precipice of immense height, he led the horse and assisted her to dismount. The wide table-rock lay stretched before them in every direction; he had chosen this position because he could not be suddenly attacked while occupying it, nor could an enemy approach undiscovered. There was no danger of an ambush or surprise there. After freeing his horse from his equipments, that he might browse freely, he commenced preparation for the noonday repast.

Hardly however had he gathered the light wood, a task in which Esther, glad of exercise after her tedious ride, blithely assisted, when the sound of a horse coming down the path on the opposite side from which they had entered upon the rocky plain startled them, and while the girl fled to the concealment of the bushes, Osse 'o hastily snatched his arms and prepared to defend her. A cheerful, ringing voice followed the hoof-tramp they had heard.

"Come, old feller, don't be going to sleep. A half-a-dozen rods further, and you can roll in clover. Whew! it has been an orful long trail though. Come on and—" here the speaker

came in full sight of the plateau as he spoke. Instantly changing both his manner and his voice, he continued :

"Ef thar hain't one of them blasted red-skins! I only hope it's that cus—blessed Black Eagle! Maybe thar won't be a scrimmage then," and his rifle was at his shoulder. "By thunder, I know that are horse; it's the only one I ever saw that could range with my black. Hullo! Show your hand, stranger—friend or foe?"

The Indian dropped his rifle, and holding out his hand, palm foremost, in token of amity, slowly advanced.

"Ef you're the rightful owner of that horse, you must be Osse 'o."

"And you Waltermyer?"

"Just as true as shootin'. Give me your hand, old chap. Here, Waupee, jump down, it's all friendly. I didn't know at first but that there mought be a chance of a fight, but it's all right now. But I say, Osse 'o, what in the name of goodness brought you here?"

"Let my brother wait and look," and proceeding to the bushes, after a very brief explanation to Esther, Osse 'o led her forward.

Waltermyer dashed forward and grasping the hand of the white girl, shook it with enthusiastic warmth, exclaiming in his deep, trumpet-like voice :

"Just speak one word, beauty. Just say that your name is Esther and I'll be happy as you please."

"That certainly is my name. But why do you want to know?"

"Come here, Waupee;" and he lifted the Indian from his horse's back and placed her by the side of the white girl. "There you are; now get acquainted." The two females greeted each other kindly, while the happy frontiersman was stripping his good steed and shouting :

"Three cheers for you—and you—and all of us. I know the hull story, Osse 'o, and so do you, I suppose, only I can't surmise how you came to be here, any more than you can how I got to the shelf. Come, gals, stir about and let's have a little somethin' to eat. I am as ravenous as a b'ar in the spring-time; more'n that, I want to git down on the perarer where it's smooth sailin' before sun-down."

Ready hands make quick work ; and it was not long before that strangely-arranged quartette were seated upon the low rock, satisfying their hunger. Not much time did it require either for them to be fully conversant with the history of each other's wanderings and meetings.

The tramp of a horse startled the whole party at last.

"What in thunder is up now?" shouted Waltermyer, snatching his rifle and springing to his feet.

"The Mormon!" replied Osse'o.

"Black Eagle!" whispered the Indian woman ; and seizing Esther by the hand she almost dragged her into the concealment of the bushes.

"Twin devils!" exclaimed Waltermyer, loosening his pistols in his belt ready for instant service, and whistling to his horse he drove him back toward the perpendicular rocks.

No further words issued from the already compressed lips of the Indian ; but after he had, also, placed his horse by the side of black Star, he took his position near Waltermyer and awaited the issue that was forced upon them.

There was silence long enough for the heart to throb scarce a score of times, and then, at the same instant, Black Eagle rode upon the plateau from one side, and the Mormon entered on foot from the other.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DUEL IN THE WILDERNESS—A STARTLING REVELATION.

Thus the savage and the Elder met, man to man, on equal terms, the Indian only having an advantage in the possession of his horse. Waltermyer and Osse'o had succeeded in securing their horses, and retreating behind an abutment of the rocks, waited for the stormy interview which was sure to follow the contact of these fiery spirits.

Black Eagle rode close to the Elder with a reckless dash, that threatened to trample him under the hoofs of the half-wild steed.

"Where is the young pale-face?" he questioned, stooping his plumed head, and hissing forth the words in a half-whisper.

"That is the very question I wish to ask you," replied the Elder.

"When your white faced warriors crept like serpents among our braves and fired on them, she escaped," answered the chief, sullenly.

"Well, that is, so far, your loss—no, not yours, for I have paid you well, and you know where the girl is. Take me to her hiding-place, or give back my gold."

"Does the pale-face think the Black Eagle a fool?" answered the chief, with a cold sneer.

"I know that I was one, to trust an Indian with money," was the reply.

"There was no trust. You gave the Dacotah gold, and he carried off the daughter of the pale-face from her father's tent. He brought her, under a guard of warriors, to the mountain. Black Eagle had snared the bird; why did you not take her while she was fluttering in the net?"

"A pretty question, on my soul! Take her, when your men fought like so many devils."

"Will the pale-face pay the Dacotah his gold?"

"What gold, you cormorant?"

"Did not he promise him plenty of yellow-dirt, when the white squaw should be given up?"

"Yes; but you lied. You concealed her."

"Whose tongue is it that speaks of treachery? The pale-face was false alike to his own tribe and that of Black Eagle. Go up on the mountain and look. The warriors speak angrily, their wounds are fresh. Had the tongue but traveled the trail of truth, there would have been no mourning and blackened faces in the wigwams of the Dacotahs."

"That is nothing to the purpose. Will you either give me back my gold, or produce the girl?"

"The gold that the white man asks for is hidden where no eye but that of the Black Eagle can ever find it. If the false medicine of the tribe at Salt Lake wants the maiden of the snowy skin, let him find her."

The passions of these bad men were rapidly getting the better of their judgment. Each knew, by this time, that the other was playing a desperate game, and watching for some advantage. The Indian was resolved upon revenge, and

securing the gold he knew the other had about him, and the Mormon felt that he was in a position of terrible peril.

While these two treacherous men stood glaring at each other, Esther Morse cowered in the undergrowth, panic-stricken by the sight of her mortal enemies. Waupee stood by her, pale, stern, and with glittering eyes, like a statue of bronze.

Waltermyer and Osse 'o stood behind a sheltering cliff that jutted, tower-like, on the plateau lapping over the face of the rocky wall, watching the scene with great indifference; both these men were too brave for any thought of peril to the woman they protected.

Esther Morse grew frightened as the two angry men moved nearer the place of her concealment, and starting up suddenly, placed her foot on a fragment of rock, in order to flee back into a more secure concealment. Her foot slipped, and she fell forward with a low cry.

Black Eagle knew the voice, for he had heard its shrieks of pain before.

"Traitor! Out of my way."

"Let the pale-face beware! The blood of the warriors of the Dacotahs cries aloud for vengeance. The thirsty earth is drunk with it."

It required all the strength and influence of Waltermyer, to keep Osse 'o from interfering.

"It's a fair fight," said the frontiersman; "they are nothing but infernal reptyles anyhow. No, no; let them fight it out, for brutes as they are. It's b'ar and wolf-hound; who cares which whips?"

The Mormon still advanced, intent only on seizing his prey; but the Indian spurred his horse between him and the thicket where Esther was concealed.

Black Eagle strung his bow, and placing the feathered shaft upon the well-strained string, drew it deliberately.

"Die, fool!" was the sneering response, and the report of the revolver awoke the echoes of the rocks.

"By heaven!" exclaimed the excited Waltermyer, forgetting his usual caution, as the horse of the Indian fell backward in his death struggles, for the bullet had missed the human form, and buried itself in the heart of the beast. "By

heavens—forgive me, poor little Est, I couldn't help it; but, the noblest brute of the party has fallen before the coward shot."

It was the work of a moment for the active red-man to free himself from his steed, for even while he was falling, he had swung himself clear, and sent an arrow in return for the shot. For a moment the revolver pealed and the bow-string snapped, but without fatal effects, though both combatants were wounded. At length the pistol charges were exhausted, and the frayed, overstrained string of the bow broken, and the combatants mutually paused, glaring at each other.

The lull in the storm of battle was only for a moment, for the Indian hurled his keen hatchet full at the head of the Mormon. Fortunately, the aim had been hurried and uncertain, for it missed its intended mark, and shivered to pieces on the rocky floor of their battle-ground. The discharged pistol was still in the hands of the white man, and the Indian had his knife. In physical strength they were about evenly matched, but the Black Eagle had much the advantage in the training of his wild life.

"Now the fun is comin'," whispered Waltermyer. "Thar they go like Kilkenny cats."

"But think of their lives," replied Esther, for the first time speaking.

"Think what would become of you, if either of them got thar hands on you."

"But it's horrible!"

"Pshaw! Thar lives ain't of any more 'count than a sneakin' cayote."

The Indian woman sat with bowed head. She knew well that the man she had loved so passionately was engaged in a desperate encounter, but though there might have been something of that former love yet lingering around her heart, the education of a lifetime rendered it a duty to restrain her feelings. It was not for a woman to take part in the strife of warriors.

Hand to hand the fight was renewed. It was a series of rapidly executed movements. To strike and guard—to advance and retreat. But few were the injuries inflicted, and when, at length, the blade of the knife was broken upon the

barrel of the pistol, and that weapon fell from the hand of which it was the sole defense, they stood with only the arms that nature had given them, bloody and fatigued.

From a long-protracted struggle the Indian rose, reeling with the loss of blood, and, staggering forward, he snatched his bow from the rocky floor, restrung it with his trembling fingers, and then groped, half blindly, around until he had secured the broken knife. Enough apparently remained for his purpose, for, kneeling, he attempted to sharpen it, and a smile of terrible meaning flitted athwart his dark face, as he felt of the edge. He regained his feet, and staggered up to the fallen white man. He twined his fingers in the long hair, wet already with the damps of death, and raised his arm on high. Esther Morse turned her head away with horror. Osse 'o involuntarily raised his shield, but Waltermeyer burst through all restraint, and dashed forward, exclaiming:

"By the light of heaven, you shall not scalp him! A cussed, treacherous reptyle as he was, he was yet a white man, and shall not be butchered."

Yet, quick as Waltermeyer's movements had been, Osse 'o glided in before him, and Waupee, breaking through all bonds, followed, leaving the white girl alone.

Black Eagle heard them coming. He turned upon them, and met the man, whose intended murder lay on his soul, face to face. With a fierce cry he loosened his hold upon the Mormon, and tottered toward the verge of the cliff. Then, a true woman still, the discarded wife dashed forward to save him with an outcry of passionate despair. She was too late. For a moment, long enough to fix his arrow on the string, he retained his footing, sent the shaft, even in his death agonies, flying through the air, and, with the death-song of the Dacotahs ringing from his lips, fell backward into the dark valley.

Waltermeyer, busy in examining the body of the Mormon, to see if any thing of life remained, had not seen the action. He was intent only on the dead man before him, for the spirit had passed to its final accountability.

"Waal, waal," he said, almost pitifully, for, with death, all his feelings changed, "I never knew any good of you, and,

for a white man, you were most onaccountably undesarvin'. But I reckon you must have had a soft spot in your heart, somewhar, and I'm sorry now that I didn't kinder take care of you. It was onnatural, that's a fact. But I saved your scalp, anyhow, and that's some comfort. More 'an that, it shan't be said that I left you without a grave. No, no, I'll take good care that you don't lie here, for the wolves to snarl over. Osse 'o, Osse 'o, I say; whar are you, man?"

Waltermyer started to his feet, in sudden terror, for the usually musical voice was changed into a hoarse whisper.

"What's the matter with you, man?" he questioned, as he saw that the lithe steps of the red-man had grown slow and unsteady. That the flashing eye was dim, and that both hands were pressed upon his side, as if to still some great pain.

"Nothing, nothing. Don't tell the daughter of the pale-face," was the whispered reply, and Osse 'o fell into the outstretched arms of Waltermyer.

"By heaven! if there is not an arrow stickin' in his side."

A shriek rung from the bushes, and Esther Morse sprung to his side and knelt down by the wounded man, while Waupee, with the nimble and soft fingers of an Indian, used to such occurrences, was busy unfastening the garments.

"Don't! don't!" came struggling from the ashy lips of the sufferer. "Let me die."

"If I do, may I be shot," exclaimed the frontiersman, and his strong hands quickly tore away the fastenings.

"By heaven! It's a white man!" he shouted. "No red-skin, but just as white as your's, gal. Look and see!"

Waupee carefully drew out the arrow-head and stanchd the blood.

"It is a hunting-arrow, not a poisoned one for war," he continued, as she held it up to Waltermyer.

Esther saw the white shoulder glowing from under the torn hunting-shirt, and knew, with a thrill of joy, that the man whom she had so long taken for a Dacotah was of the same complexion as herself. Even then she remembered the situation in which she had been placed with him, and her cheek, neck and brow burned again. Ah! how well she remembered many an act and word, thought but lightly of at

the time, that now identified his claim to birth and education; but she had no time for these thronging fancies. Would he live? A fervent prayer went forth from her heart, then nerving herself for the task, she strove to assist in dressing the wound. Gently, but firmly, she was repulsed.

"The children of the Dacotahs," murmured Waupee, are learned in the ways of the medicine. The hand of the pale-face is like the aspen-leaf in the breath of the storm, and her heart is faint as the dove."

"But, will he live?"

"Life is the gift of the great Manitou."

"Yes, yes; don't trouble your pretty heart about it, beauty he'll soon be around again," exclaimed Waltermyer, holding the wounded man in his powerful arms, and bearing him to the shade of the bushes, tenderly as a mother would have carried her first-born.

Waupee succeeded in stanching the blood, and then, from the neighboring woods, gathered healing herbs, and carefully bound them on the wound, while the white girl lifted Osse 'o's head from the hard rocks, and pillowed it in her lap. Waltermyer departed for the woods, and after a long absence, returned, bringing with him pine-branches and curving strips of bark, sufficient to make a shelter, and these, in the hands of Waupee, soon were framed into an almost fairy-like bower. When Osse 'o fell asleep, in his fragrant shelter, Waltermyer sat smoking his pipe at the door of the lodge, silently at first, but, ere long, his restless spirit broke forth in words:

"Waal; I did the best I could for the Mormon."

"You buried him, then?" asked Esther, solemnly.

"Yes, deep and well. I piled the stones up, so as to know the place again if I ever should see any of his relations, and they wanted to find it."

The Indian woman—the poor, brutally-abused und suddenly widowed wife—looked steadily at him with her large, black eyes, but said nothing. Waltermyer fully understood the look, and replied:

"Yes, yes, Waupee, I did the same for the Black Eagle. Perhaps neither of them would have done it for me; but I can't help that. I made him a grave for your sake, and fixed it up, Dacotah fashion, down by the spring. I knew their

customs, and thought every one of the tribe would like to add a stone to the pile when they passed; so I fixed it in just as handy a place as I could."

A look of fervent gratitude passed over the face of the widow; then arising, solemnly, she covered her face in her hands, and slowly walked away. Esther would have accompanied her, but Waltermyer laid his hand on her arm, and whispered:

"Let her go alone. To-night she will watch by the grave. It's a part of their religion, I allow. And now you go to sleep, while I watch."

"No, I! He watched me when I slept last night; why should I not do the same for him when he so much needs my care?"

"Waal, it's woman's business to take care of the sick, I s'pose; but you don't look over strong. Thar hain't many roses a-blossomin' on your cheeks, but they will come again in time; and you couldn't take care of a braver or a better one, if you war to search the world over."

"You know him, then?—tell me his history."

Waltermyer obeyed her, and revealed all that he knew of the wounded man.

The night passed, and with it all apparent danger; for now Osse 'o was able to sit up and converse.

"Why does Waupee stay so long?" asked Esther, whose true womanly heart had sorrowed deeply as she thought of the Indian widow sitting by that lonely grave in the dark hours.

"I will go and see," replied Waltermyer.

And I, if our patient can spare us for a moment," said Esther, with a smile that would have amply repaid the semi-Indian for a far more dangerous wound.

"Yes," was the whispered response. "I have known her well; she was a very queen for goodness, virtue, and truth among the Dacotahs."

They found the Indian widow stretched upon the grave of her late lord and master. They thought that, worn out with suffering and watchfulness, she had cast herself down to sleep; and so she had. The poor woman had fallen into that sleep which knows no waking. She had passed from earth calmly

and apparently without a struggle, for no traces of pain lingered on the pale face—upturned, as if looking to the blue heaven above. With a broken heart she had followed her husband to the happy hunting-grounds, faithful even in death. By his side she was buried; and as the kind, tender-hearted frontiersman piled the last stone upon the rude monument that was to mark her grave, his eyes filled with tears, and he hoarsely whispered:

“Poor woman! May she be happier in heaven than she ever was on earth. I didn’t think I should ever have cried over a red-skin; but thar’s no use in denyin’ it now, and if she had lived—Waal, waal, she’s at rest.”

In sorrow and sadness of heart they returned to the plateau. In the freshness of that dewy morning, with Osse ’o again mounted on the snowy steed, for Esther would have it so, herself mounted on “Black Star,” and Waltermyer walking silently forward, they left the mountain and the lonely graves, never to tread again those rocky and dangerous fastnesses

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME.

A SWIFT ride through the prairies brought Esther Morse, with the two horsemen who had proved a sure escort, into her father’s camp. Two days and a night they had journeyed on from the mountain where Black Eagle and his wife lay sleeping. Danger is to love what the hot-house proves to a delicate plant—its blossoms spring into quick, vivid life, with little regard to time.

When the little party rode into Morse’s canvas settlement, there was no Indian in the group; yet the number was exactly the same as when it left the mountain—three, and no more. Osse ’o was there in his rich, savage dress, his noble person unchanged, but his complexion had grown fair, and in his eyes you saw the brooding tenderness with which young La Clide had regarded the first lady of his love.

Never had the grand passion changed a man as Osse 'o was changed after he knew how near Esther had been to forgiving the savage character he had assumed. His disgust of civilized life died a gentle death; his taste for prairie adventures disappeared. He was the betrothed husband of Esther Morse; the bereaved father had only recovered his child to give her away again.

It was settled that the party should turn back from the Oregon trail, and seek the first white settlement where the marriage ceremony could be performed. Morse sent his followers on their way, made wealthy by the property with which he had intended to open a new settlement. So with wagons well crowded with stock and tents, the train moved one way, while the few persons in whom we are most interested retraced their steps toward civilization.

At Laramie a quiet marriage service made Esther Morse the wife of young La Clide. To this point Waltermyer had accompanied his friends. Perhaps he had intended to leave them there; but if so, his great heart failed him; and he journeyed on in their company till school-houses and steeple ceased to be a novelty to him.

They reached the bank of the giant Missouri, where its turbulent tide rushes grandly into the "father of waters." The boat that was to bear them away was already puffing at its wharf, when the father and husband wrung the hand of Waltermyer, and tendered a home with them in exchange for his prairie life.

"No, no!" he replied, in a voice husky with emotion; "my place is out on the prairie. I shouldn't be happy in the settlements; that may be more work for me to do. No; but I thank you for your kind offers, and shall not forget them. Good-by. I didn't ever think my eyes would be wet again," and he turned as if to depart.

"Waltermyer, my kind friend—"

It was the voice of the young bride, and he turned again:

"Waal, Miss?"

"I am going to ask a favor of you."

"A favor of me? Waal, you shall have it. Ask me for any thing in natur', just my life even, and it's yours."

"Will you take care of my horse until I return?"

"Will I?" and a smile brightened his bronze face. "Will I? Would a bee stop to suck honey from a clover-top? But you don't mean to part with him for good? You can't mean that?"

"We are going on a long journey, you know. Some one must take charge of him until our return. You will not refuse me?"

A shrill whistle was his only answer. Both horses came, forming a striking contrast. Snow-Drift, with his snowy skin and silver mane, and the black, with his banner-like tail, the white spot shining in his forehead like a crystal star.

Good-by! The steamer, with its living freight, dashed oceanward; and Waltermyer, accompanied by his tried companion La Moine, hastened again to the broad prairies and the rocky cañons of the Nevadas.

A year passed rapidly to the voyagers, in, to them, strange lands. Their eyes rested on the castellated towers of "merrie England"—their feet wandered among the crags, and they listened to the merry songs of Switzerland—they roamed amid the vineyards of France—and grew sad among the ruins of imperial Rome. Then, with hearts and minds filled with the beauties of past ages, came the thought of their native land. Home—peerless to the long absent! Home—the sweetest thought and the dearest word of earth.

The ocean was recrossed. The lithe spars had bent to the snowy canvas, the rainbow flag floated from the fore, and through the placid waters the swift-winged keel glided, as if all the good spirits of ocean had gently pressed it on with watery fingers.

The mansion of Claude La Clide had been refitted more sumptuously than ever. The grounds had grown more luxuriant—shrub and tree were laden with June blossoms, and the bright air heavy with perfume. Many a curiously fastened box had arrived, for La Clide and his wife, both lovers of the beautiful, had purchased lavishly in their wanderings, and expectation was on the *qui vive*, in the neighborhood, to learn what all the signs of preparation could mean.

A wandering group of girls had paused at the gate before the long-deserted mansion, during an early evening walk, and stood looking up the tree and flower shaded and walled

avenue, commenting upon the beautiful scene. One young girl of the group, at least, looked upon the stately dwelling with bitter—bitter feelings. She was thinking of the time when she had a right to come and go within that mansion, almost as its mistress. In the foolish pride and evil passions of her reckless youth, she had crushed the flowers of a manly love into the dust, and so lost every thing. Oh, how bitter—what wormwood and gall, in such an hour like that, were the simple words, "It might have been."

"Miss Worthington—Ellen," said a gentleman, as he joined the group, "have you heard the news?"

"I? Assuredly not, if it is news."

"Well, I am glad to be the first to tell it you."

"Is it so very interesting?"

"To you I should think it would be."

There was a marked emphasis on the words, and a hidden meaning in them, intended for her ear alone. She turned pale, and looked at the speaker sharply. It was the man who had tempted her to play the coquette with the owner of that princely establishment, who, in his turn, had trifled with her, and now stood ready to enjoy her anguish.

"Me? You speak in riddles, sir," she faltered.

"Well, then, I will be plain. Claude La Clide has married a rich and beautiful wife, either in England or France, I forget which, and will be home with her to-night. It is time they were here now, I fancy."

"Married! married!" gasped the girl. "Well, sir, what is that to me?"

It was bitter—bitter cruel that she should be so humbled by the very man for whom she had so basely used her once noble lover. Before she could move away, or recover composure, a cloud of dust announced the approach of a carriage. On it came, glittering in the slant sunbeams, drawn by richly caparisoned horses, that fretted against the curb in their high-blooded vitality. Within were seated a middle-aged man, a younger one, whom the group recognized at once, and a woman, whose calm, sweet loveliness struck them with admiration. On they whirled, through the broad entrance of the chestnut avenue. The dust from the wheels almost crushed that pale girl, as they whirled by, falling on her as unheeded

as it fell on the crouching stone lions keeping ward at the gate. Like an angel driven from a second Eden, she turned away. He had not seen her—never would look upon her again with love lights in his eyes.

The lady moon rose high in the heavens, and the golden stars flung their braided rays to earth. The flowers breathed fragrance from their chalice lips. The trees sung a melodious lyric, and the voice of the river came stealing to their ears, softened by distance, like the deeper notes of a wind-swept harp.

On the balcony of La Clide's dwelling the master and mistress stood, watching the moonlight shimmering down upon the waves, and drinking in the entire loveliness of a scene few countries could equal.

"Oh, how beautiful! And this is our home!" whispered the wife, as if her voice—and a sweet one it was—could disturb the fairy-like panorama before, above and around her. "How much more beautiful than any thing we saw even in Italy."

"Yes, there are few scenes that can match it in any land. To me it has every charm, dearest."

"Yes, truly. Every thing is so more than beautiful it could not be otherwise. No wonder you speak of a charm."

"Do you not feel it? Does not your heart thrill with it? Is not your mind full of it? Ah, yes, I see you understand me now. It is—"

"Home, Osse 'o—La Clide—husband, it is HOME!"

THE END.

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